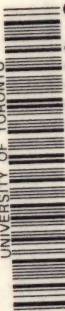


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PHILOSOPHIES ANCIENT AND MODERN

THOMAS HOBBS

## NOTE

As a consequence of the success of the series of *Religions Ancient and Modern*, Messrs. CONSTABLE have decided to issue a set of similar primers, with brief introductions, lists of dates, and selected authorities, presenting to the wider public the salient features of the *Philosophies* of Greece and Rome and of the Middle Ages, as well as of modern Europe. They will appear in the same handy Shilling volumes, with neat cloth bindings and paper envelopes, which have proved so attractive in the case of the *Religions*. The writing in each case will be confided to an eminent authority, and one who has already proved himself capable of scholarly yet popular exposition within a small compass.

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# THOMAS HOBBS

By  
A. E. TAYLOR

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## PREFATORY NOTE

THIS brief sketch has throughout been written directly from the original text of Hobbes himself and his contemporary biographers, though use has, of course, been made, especially in the first chapter, of the labours of such modern students as Professor Croom Robertson, Professor F. Tönnies, and Sir Leslie Stephen. The verbal quotations from Hobbes's works are given from the following editions: (1) *Elements of Philosophy, (Concerning Body)*, London, 1656; (2) *Human Nature* and *De Corpore Politico*, from the third edition of *Hobbes's Tripos*, London, 1864; (3) *Leviathan*, from the reprint of the first edition in the series of 'Cambridge English Classics,' 1904, which has been carefully compared with my own copy of the edition of 1651, (apparently one of the 'inferior' issue). The spelling of these editions has been preserved, but the punctuation modified in accord with present-day usage. Allusions to the Latin texts of (1) and (3) are based on the edition of Hobbes's *Opera Philosophica* published by Blaeuw of Amsterdam in 1668.

A. E. TAYLOR.



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# THOMAS HOBBS

## CHAPTER I

### LIFE

THE long life of Thomas Hobbes covers almost the whole of the most critical period alike in the growth of modern science and in the development of the British Constitution. Born in the year of the Armada, Hobbes did not die until nine years before the great Revolution which finally determined the question whether the British Islands should be ruled constitutionally or absolutely. He lived through the Stuart attempt to convert England into an absolute monarchy, the Puritan revolution and great Civil War, the political and ecclesiastical experiments of the Long Parliament and of Cromwell, the restoration of the exiled line, and the beginnings of modern Whiggism and Nonconformity. Still more remarkable were the changes which came over the face of science during the same period. When Hobbes entered

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the University as a lad, the sham Aristotelian of the Middle Ages was still officially taught in lecture-rooms; before he died, mechanical science had been placed on a secure footing by Kepler, Galileo, and Descartes, the foundations of scientific study of physiology and magnetism had been laid by Harvey and Gilbert, the Royal Society for experimental research into nature had been incorporated for more than a generation, analytical geometry had been created by Descartes and the calculus by Leibniz and Newton, when it was only eight years after his death that the final exposition of the new mechanical conception of the universe was given by Newton's *Principia*. It is only natural that a philosopher who was also a keen observer of men and affairs, living through such a period of crisis, should have made the most daring of all attempts to base the whole of knowledge on the principles of mechanical materialism, and should also have become the creator of a purely naturalistic theory of ethics and sociology.

Thomas Hobbes, the second son of the Vicar of Westport, now included in the town of Malmesbury in Wiltshire, was prematurely born on Good Friday, April 5, 1588. His own theory was that both his premature birth and his constitu-



tional timidity were consequences of his mother's alarm at the impending approach of the Great Armada. The father, 'one of the ignorant Sir Johns of Elizabeth's time,' fell into trouble by assaulting a rival cleric at the church door, and was obliged to go into hiding, but the boy's education was cared for by a maternal uncle, who was a flourishing glover and alderman of Malmesbury. After a period of preliminary schooling at Malmesbury and Westport, where he learned enough of the classical languages to translate Euripides' *Medea* into Latin verse at the age of fourteen, the lad was sent to Oxford, where he was entered at Magdalen Hall, then an important centre of Puritanism. It was a time of general relaxation of university discipline, and the acrimonious attacks made by Hobbes in later life on the English Universities as haunts of debauchery, hotbeds of disloyalty, and places where the elements of Mathematics and Physics were unknown, must have been chiefly based on his undergraduate experiences. He tells us himself of the contempt he conceived for the traditional scholastic logic and physics expounded by his tutors, and of the joy he felt in escaping from their lectures to the bookshops where he could pore over books of travel and maps, and follow

in imagination the voyages of the great Elizabethan buccaneers.

This rather unprofitable period of University life ended, after five years, when Hobbes graduated Bachelor of Arts on February 5, 1607. Immediately afterwards he formed what was to prove a lifelong and honourable connection with the rising family of Cavendish. William Cavendish, Baron Hardwick (afterwards Earl of Devonshire), second son by her second marriage of the famous 'Bess of Hardwick,' being anxious to find a suitable companion and tutor for his eldest son, offered the post to Hobbes on the recommendation of the then President of Magdalen Hall. By all accounts Hobbes's actual services seem to have been those of companion rather than tutor. Young Mr. Cavendish was a decided spendthrift, and it became Hobbes's function to assist him in raising frequent loans. Studies were freely neglected, and Hobbes himself 'almost forgot his Latin.' Fortunately, in 1610, the two young men were sent to make the grand tour of the Continent, and travelled together over a great part of France, Germany, and Italy. As yet Hobbes appears to have been untouched by the new scientific movement, though it was only in the preceding year that Kepler had published

the first two of his famous laws, and Galileo was at the very height of his glory, owing to his recent discovery of the satellites of Jupiter. The main effect of the journey was to revive Hobbes's interest in his neglected literary studies, and to send him home with a fixed determination to make himself a thorough scholar. The resolve was executed so successfully that Hobbes not merely became one of the most vigorous and luminous of English writers, but learned to handle Latin, still the general language of the learned world, with rare force and fluency. The first-fruits of this renewed interest in learning was an English translation of Thucydides, published in 1628-9, for the purpose, as Hobbes said at the time, of educating his readers in the true principles of statesmanship. Afterwards, when his absolutist political theories had been fully developed, he wished it to be believed that his real object had been to warn Englishmen against the dangers of democracy, by showing them how much wiser a single great statesman is than a multitude.

From Hobbes's admirer, John Aubrey, we learn something about the circles in which he was moving at this time of his life. Foremost among his friends stands Francis Bacon, who 'loved to

converse with him,' and employed him on the translation of some of the famous *Essays*, notably that on *The True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates*, into Latin. This connection can be shown to belong to the years 1621-6 when Bacon, after his political disgrace, was devoting himself entirely to scientific work in his retreat at Gorham-bury. The influence of Bacon, however, has left no trace on Hobbes's own matured thought. He barely mentions the Chancellor in his writings, and has no place for 'Baconian induction' in his own conception of scientific method. Bacon's zeal for experiment, the redeeming feature in an otherwise chaotic scheme of thought, is entirely alien to the essentially deductive and systematic spirit of the Hobbian philosophy. Other friends of this period were Ben Jonson, the reigning literary dictator of London, Edward Herbert, Baron Cherbury, the 'first of the English Deists,' the antagonist against whom Locke's attack on 'innate ideas' was afterwards to be directed, and the now forgotten Scottish poet, Sir Robert Ayton.

In 1628 Hobbes's ex-pupil died, after a two years' tenure of the Earldom of Devonshire, leaving the family estates heavily encumbered. The necessary retrenchments involved a tem-

porary severance of Hobbes's connection with the Cavendishes, and from 1629 to 1631 he acted as tutor to the son of Sir Gervase Clifton, a gentleman of Nottinghamshire. He accompanied this new pupil on a foreign tour, which apparently extended through France and as far as Venice. It was probably during this period that an incident occurred which was to exercise a lasting, and not entirely happy influence on the whole of Hobbes's subsequent thought. At the age of forty he was, for the first time, introduced to the works of Euclid, and at once 'fell in love with geometry,' being attracted, he says, more by the rigorous manner of proof employed than by the matter of the science. (Mathematics, we must remember, were then only beginning to be seriously studied in England. Hobbes tells us that in his undergraduate days geometry was still looked upon generally as a form of the 'Black Art,' and it was not until 1619 that the will of Sir Henry Savile, Warden of Merton College, established the first Professorships of Geometry and Astronomy at Oxford.)

In 1631 Hobbes was recalled from Paris by the widow of his late pupil to take charge of the education of her eldest son, the third Earl of Devonshire, then a boy of twelve. By 1634 the

lad was thought old enough to make the continental tour, and Hobbes accompanied him on a journey through France and Italy, from which the pair did not return until 1637. This third foreign journey was destined to be the turning-point of Hobbes's intellectual life. All through the journey he was haunted by a single idea, the thought of the omnipresence of motion in nature, and of the apparent variety of natural objects as a mere effect of diversity of motion in the different parts of body. The origin of this absorption in the notion of motion he derives from the following undated incident. In a company of learned men, among whom he was present, a chance reference to sensation provoked the contemptuous question, 'And, pray, what is sense?' Reflecting long on this chance question, Hobbes came to the conclusion that if all bodies were at rest or all moved exactly in the same way, there would be no means of distinguishing any one thing from any other, and therefore no sensation. Hence not only must the whole of physical nature consist, as Galileo was already declaring, of diversity of motions of homogeneous particles, but the same must be true of the inner world of our so-called 'mental processes,' they must all be but so many diverse motions in what we now



call our 'nervous system.' With this conclusion Hobbes's path as a philosopher was marked out. His task was to be the exhibition of all the facts of the universe, and more particularly those of the inner life of emotion and will, as consequences of the primary laws of motion. Hence, in the preface to the *De Corpore*, after mentioning as the founders of true physical science Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Harvey, he adds that the true doctrine of civil society is no older than his own book *De Cive*.

Evidence discovered by Dr. Ferdinand Tönnies has now made it probable that the facts just described belong to a date some years anterior to the journey of 1637, but, in any case, Hobbes's third residence abroad marks a definite epoch in his life. It is the date at which he first takes his place as a recognised member of the band of European thinkers who were aiming at the systematic reconstruction of science. In Italy he met the great Galileo, not yet, indeed, blind, but confined by the Inquisition to his villa, and a little tarnished in his renown by his insincere recantation. Almost more important were the connections formed on the return to Paris in 1637. Here Hobbes became one of the circle which centred around the famous Franciscan friar,

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Marin Mersenne, who performed what, in the absence of scientific journals, was the indispensable service of furthering the communication of knowledge by bringing learned men together, in person or by correspondence. Mersenne's cell, says Hobbes, was more to him than all the universities. We may note that this same year saw the publication of the first work of another of Mersenne's constant correspondents, his old school-fellow, René Descartes, now for years settled in his self-chosen Dutch seclusion.

Before the end of 1637 Hobbes and his pupil were once more in England, where the times, as we know, now began to be singularly troublous. The next two years saw the trial of Hampden for his refusal to pay ship-money, the Edinburgh revolt against the ill-judged attempt to force Episcopacy on Scotland, the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant, and the Scottish invasion of England. In virtue of his connection with the Devonshire family, Hobbes was just now much in the society of the more moderate Royalist leaders, such as Falkland and Hyde, and the result was that early in 1640, about the time of meeting of the Short Parliament, he put aside his wider philosophical schemes for the composition of a little work in support of his fundamental political



conviction that the anti-social tendencies of human nature are too strong and deep-rooted to be held in check by anything short of an absolute authority, free from all control, such as the English Crown might be made, if released from all dependence on Parliament. The work, which bore the title, *The Elements of Law*, and contains one of the clearest and fullest of Hobbes's expositions of his psychology, was not printed, but circulated in manuscript. Ten years later it was published in an imperfect form as two distinct essays, *Of Human Nature* and *De Corpore Politico*. It was not until 1889 that the work was printed in its original shape, and with its original title, by Dr. Tönnies. When the Long Parliament met towards the end of the year, and showed its temper by at once proceeding to impeach Strafford, Hobbes's native timorousness got the better of him. Fancying that the author of the *Elements of Law* might be the next victim, he promptly escaped to Paris, not to return for eleven years. In after days he oddly represented this excessive alarm as giving him an exceptional claim on royal gratitude.

His flight brought him back to Paris in the very nick of time. Mersenne was busy, at Descartes' request, in procuring criticisms from learned men

on the famous *Meditations*, then just about to be published. One such set of criticisms he obtained from Hobbes—those which now figure as the ‘Third Objections’—but they failed to achieve their purpose. Descartes was seeking help from the criticisms of persons in sympathy with his general line of thought. What he got from Hobbes was an attack on his fundamental positions by a thinker of radically different convictions. Hence he treated the ‘Objections’ very curtly, even refusing to admit that they contained a single valid inference, nor was he more favourably impressed by Hobbes’s remarks on the *Dioptrique* published along with the *Discourse on Method* (1637), which were also communicated to him by Mersenne. On the other hand, Hobbes contracted an enduring friendship with another of the lights of Mersenne’s circle, Pierre Gassend, the reviver of Epicureanism.

During 1641 Hobbes recast in Latin his exposition of his psychological and political doctrines. The work was printed, in a very limited edition in 1642 under the title *De Cive*, and was highly appreciated even by Descartes. It was reissued five years later from the press of the Elzevirs at Amsterdam as *Elementa Philosophica de Cive*. Hobbes had meanwhile been (1646) appointed

mathematical tutor to the Prince of Wales, afterwards Charles II., who had just come over from Jersey. The engagement cannot have lasted beyond 1648, when the Prince withdrew to Holland, and was possibly ended earlier by a dangerous illness which overtook Hobbes in 1647. In after years he was accustomed to meet doubts as to his religious orthodoxy by an appeal to his acquiescence, during this illness, in the ministrations of Dr. Cosins (afterwards Bishop of Durham).

In 1651 came out an English version of the *De Cive: Philosophical Rudiments concerning Government and Society*. During the same year Hobbes was busy with the composition of the work by which he is now best known to the general student, *Leviathan: or the Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*, which appeared in London at the end of the year. The book consists of a restatement of the general philosophical argument for absolutism, with the addition of a long and bitter polemic against admitting any independent ecclesiastical authority other than the civil sovereign. A specially handsome copy of the MS. was presented to Charles II., now King of Scots, on his return to Paris after the adven-

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turous escape from Worcester. But the Anglican Royalists, who identified the cause of monarchy with the cause of the English Church, were naturally incensed at the author's consistent Erastianism and anti-clericalism, and for a time contrived to keep Hobbes from access to the King. Between this, and his concern as to the way in which the anti-papal doctrines of *Leviathan* might be received by the French clergy, Hobbes once more took alarm, and made his way back to London at the end of 1651, sending in his formal submission to the Council of State shortly after. There was just now, amid the general confusion following on the abolition of the old constitution, no censorship of the press in England to interfere with his publications. Thus it came about that the *Leviathan* could be published in London, and that so much of the great systematic work on philosophy as was ever completed appeared, after all, on English soil.

Among Hobbes's personal friends of this period we have to note the famous Selden, and the still more famous Harvey. With Milton, the chief man of letters among the anti-Royalists, he had no relations, though it is recorded that Milton 'did not like him, but would acknowledge him to be a man of great parts.' Hobbes, for his part,

declared, comparing Milton's famous *Defence of the People of England* with Salmasius' *Defence of the King*, 'they are very good Latin both, and hardly to be judged, which is better, and both very ill reasoning, hardly to be judged, which is worse.'

Hobbes was now at last, at the age of 64, working on the reasoned exposition of his system. When completed, the scheme was to contain three divisions: (1) of Body, the presentation of the fundamental principles of the new science of motion, and the deduction from them of a doctrine of physics; (2) of Man, a further deduction from the same principles, of human physiology and psychology; (3) of the Body Politic, a deduction of ethics, politics, and sociology from the results reached in the previous sections. Thus the final achievement would have been the deduction of social science as a body of corollaries from the principles of mechanics. From the first, the execution of this plan was delayed by controversies, largely provoked by Hobbes's own mistakes, and the great scheme never reached fulfilment. The first section was, indeed, completed, but the second remained a mere fragment, and the third is represented only by works like the *De Cive* and *Leviathan*, originally composed as independent treatises.

The *De Corpore*, though in the press in 1654, did not appear until 1655, the reason of the delay being that, during the interval, Hobbes had discovered flaws in the quadrature of the circle which he fancied himself to have found, and of which he had been rather rashly boasting in advance. By the time of publication he had further become implicated in the eternal dispute about the freedom of the will, and the consequence of his double controversy with the mathematicians and the theologians was that, when the *De Homine* at last appeared in 1658, it turned out to contain nothing but a few chapters on optics, along with a brief sketch of elementary psychology. For many years after 1655 Hobbes's career as an author is mainly the history of a series of acrimonious disputes with mathematical and theological opponents.

The theological disputés go back ultimately to the year 1646, when Hobbes had held a verbal discussion with Bramhall, Bishop of Londonderry, and afterwards Archbishop of Armagh, in which he maintained the determinist view of human action against the Arminian and High Anglican doctrine of free will. Both parties had afterwards reduced the substance of their contentions to writing, though with an understanding that



nothing should be published on either side. In 1654, however, an unknown person who had procured a copy of Hobbes's MS., which contains one of the clearest statements ever made of the argument for determinism, published it under the title *A Discourse concerning Liberty and Necessity*. Bramhall, angered at what he supposed to be the bad faith of Hobbes, replied in 1655 by publishing his own original contribution to the controversy, Hobbes rejoining in the next year with a fresh set of *Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance*. The 'questions' were, in turn, attacked by Bramhall in 1658 in a work to which was appended a violent attack on *Leviathan*, facetiously styled *The Catching of Leviathan, the Great Whale*. Hobbes took no notice of this onslaught beyond drawing up, ten years later (1668), a refutation of Bramhall's imputations of impiety, which, like most of his writings of that time, was not published until after his death.

More damaging for Hobbes was his violent quarrel with the Oxford mathematicians, itself an outgrowth of his attacks on the Universities. Like many other persons who have never quite made themselves at home in geometry, Hobbes unluckily conceived the notion that he had solved

the famous (and insoluble) problems of the quadrature of the circle and the subdivision of the angle into any given number of equal parts. In palliation of his delusion it may be pleaded that neither problem was definitely known in his day to be insoluble by the methods of elementary geometry. In fact the insolubility of the more famous of the two, that of the quadrature, has only been finally demonstrated in our own time by Lindemann, though a sounder mathematical instinct would, no doubt, have suggested to Hobbes that it probably was not to be solved. His fault lay not so much in attempting to grapple with the problem as in the obstinacy with which he refused to recognise the futility of his results, even when they had been repeatedly exposed by the first mathematicians of the day. A few words must be said as to the history of the quarrel. Hobbes had, in *Leviathan*, made a bitter attack on the Universities, which he regarded as the chief supporters of clerical pretensions, and had particularly enlarged on their ignorance of mathematics and natural science. He did not know, or forgot, that the Oxford of 1651 was a very different place from the Oxford of half a century earlier. The Savilian Professorships had done much to raise the standard of mathematical



and physical knowledge, and Oxford was already the home of an eager band of scientific workers who were subsequently to form the nucleus of the Royal Society. The resentment of the Oxford men of science against Hobbes's undeserved strictures had already found expression in the *Vindiciæ Academicarum* (1654) of Seth Ward, Savilian Professor of Astronomy, a rejoinder to an attack on the Universities by the Rev. John Webster, also honourably known as one of the first writers against the belief in witchcraft. Ward, however, took only a minor part in the long and angry controversy which followed on the publication of the *De Corpore*, Hobbes's principal assailant being Ward's associate, John Wallis, Savilian Professor of Geometry, the most eminent English mathematician of the generation before Newton. Three months after the issue of the *De Corpore* in 1655 followed Wallis's *Elenchus Geometriæ Hobbianæ*, exposing the fallacies of Hobbes's quadrature, and proving, with the aid of an unbound copy of the work, that his 'solutions,' such as they were, had been repeatedly modified owing to their author's discovery of errors in them after they had been sent to the press. In 1656 there came out an English version of the *De Corpore*, made by Hobbes's instruction, but not from his own hand

(*Concerning Body*, 1656). Here the 'solutions' were given as mere 'aggressions,' or approximations, but, as a set-off, the book contained an appendix, *Six Lessons* to the Oxford Professors, decrying the whole of Wallis's mathematical work. Wallis rejoined in three months with a *Due Correction for Mr. Hobbes*, which, in its turn, provoked in 1657 an abusive reply from Hobbes, and the inevitable counter-reply from Wallis. In 1660 Hobbes returned to the fray with five Latin dialogues, *Examinatio et Emendatio Mathematicæ Hodiernæ*. Next year he proceeded to bring out a professed solution of the third of the famous ancient problems, the duplication of the cube, which was, as usual, duly refuted by Wallis. In 1662 Hobbes went on to aim a blow at the recently incorporated Royal Society, in which Wallis was a prominent figure, by attacking Boyle's experiments with the air-pump, and endeavouring to show that mere experimentation adds nothing to our insight into nature. Boyle replied with an *Examen of Mr. Hobbes his Dialogus*, and Wallis, with a scathing satire on Hobbes's mathematics, *Hobbius Heauton Timorumenus*. Hobbes wisely left this exposure unanswered, but avenged himself signally upon Wallis's incidental political insinuation against

him of having favoured Cromwell's usurpation, by a letter *On the Reputation, Loyalty, Manners, and Religion of T. H.*, in which Wallis was reminded of the service he had done to the Parliamentarians by deciphering the papers of Charles I. captured at Naseby. For some years after this the controversy slumbered, but was revived again by Hobbes in 1666. Wallis continued to refute Hobbes's various mathematical papers as they came out until 1672, and then allowed the dispute to drop. Hobbes, for his part, still kept up the game, and even in his latest work *Decameron Physiologicum*, produced when he was over ninety, contrived to insert a new 'demonstration' of the equality of a straight line to an arc of a circle.

Meanwhile, the Restoration had made some change in the philosopher's position. He was met and warmly welcomed by Charles II. a few days after his return to England, encouraged to present himself at Court, had his portrait painted at the king's expense, and received a pension of £100, which, unfortunately, was not always regularly paid. Court favour, however, could only partly protect the author of *Leviathan* from the animosity of the clergy whom he had handled so roughly. In connection with the Bill brought

into the Commons in 1666, under the influence of the emotions aroused by the Plague and the Great Fire, for the suppression of atheism and profanity, a Committee was appointed to receive informations against atheistical, blasphemous, and profane books, among which *Leviathan* was specified by name. The Bill fell through in the Lords, but Hobbes, who began to fear that he was in personal danger, made, it is said, a show of conformity, and took care, in reprinting *Leviathan* in Latin, to add an appendix intended to show that his doctrines did not formally contradict the Nicene Creed. He even took the trouble to draw up a dissertation on the state of the English law of Heresy, to prove that he could not legally be burned. From this time on, Hobbes only retained Court protection on condition of abstention from all publications on political and religious topics. For the Latin edition of his *Opera Omnia*, which appeared in 1668, he had to find a publisher in Holland, and Pepys records in his diary for September 3rd of the same year that a second-hand copy of *Leviathan* (which had originally come out at 8s.) cost him 24s., and that the price was still rising, as the book could not be reprinted. Similarly a new treatise of the same date, *Behemoth, the History of the Civil Wars*, was pro-

scribed by the censor. In spite of age and rebuffs, Hobbes still continued to write on a variety of topics, ranging from mathematics to English Law and Church History, and was frequently visited, on account of his fame as a scholar and philosopher, by foreign admirers of learning who found themselves in England.

In 1669 his clerical enemies found a characteristic method of annoying him. Daniel Scargill, a disreputable Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, was deprived of his degree and expelled from the University for having publicly maintained theses taken from *Leviathan*. Scargill was persuaded to make an edifying recantation, in which the blame for his loose life was laid on the supposed immoral principles he had imbibed from the books of Hobbes, who, thanks to the censorship, was unable to protest against the imputations. Five years later, Oxford followed suit. Dr. Fell, Dean of Christchurch, and hero of a well-known uncomplimentary epigram, took advantage of his connection with the University Press to strike out of the Latin version of Anthony Wood's *History and Antiquities of Oxford* all the appreciative epithets which the English original had bestowed on Hobbes, and to replace them by terms of abuse.

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Hobbes was this time permitted by the king to publish a letter of remonstrance, but the only effect was to draw from Dr. Fell an outrageous additional note to the book in which Hobbes was reviled more coarsely than before. Meanwhile the old man had for a while amused himself by a return to the literary pursuits of his earlier days. In 1672 he composed a succinct account of his life, works, and various controversies in Latin elegiacs, and in 1673 and the year or two following a complete version of the *Iliad and Odyssey* in English rhyme, a sufficiently arduous task for an old man well on towards his ninetieth year. In 1675 he finally left London, residing for the few years of life still left to him alternately at the two Derbyshire seats of the Devonshire family, Chatsworth and Hardwick. His last work, *Decameron Physiologicum*, was, as we have already seen, produced in 1678 at the age of ninety. At the end of the following year, when the family moved, as usual, from Chatsworth to Hardwick for the winter, Hobbes refused to be left behind. But the journey proved too much for his strength, and a few days after reaching Hardwick the old philosopher was struck by paralysis, of which he died on December 4, 1679, at the age of ninety-one years and eight months. The body was laid to rest in



## LIFE

a modest grave in the parish church of Hault Hucknall, just outside the park gates.

Hobbes's personal appearance is well known to us from various portraits, and from the description of his friend Aubrey. He was tall, erect, and strikingly handsome of face. Though sickly in youth, in manhood and later age he was exceptionally healthy and vigorous, being able even at seventy-five to enjoy an occasional game of tennis. His personal habits were regular, and in later age, abstemious, though, according to Aubrey, he owned to having been drunk about a hundred times in his life, a moderate allowance in those days especially as the good gentleman seems to have regarded occasional drunkenness as medicinal. There is a report of the existence of a natural daughter, for whom he is said to have provided. With respect to his character, there is little to be objected against except his natural timidity, and a certain lack of emotional warmth, which did not, however, prevent him from proving a benefactor to his relatives and a steady and constant friend. In spite of his rather cynical theories of human nature, he appears to have been reasonably charitable to real distress, and it is highly creditable to him, as well as to his protectors, the family of Cavendish, that, having once resolved on the life of a scholar and

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thinker, he avoided all temptations to desert his modest position for the sake of worldly advantage, and that so much care was taken to make that position compatible with his unchecked pursuit of his chosen studies. If we look in vain in his life and writings for any traces of deep spirituality and ethical inwardness, the same thing may be said of Descartes, and, in fact, of most of the eminent thinkers of an exceedingly worldly and unspiritual age. It is not often that we find, as we do in Plato, the combination in one person of intense spiritual earnestness with the faculty of cool and keen rationalistic analysis. Apart from its splendid trust in the competence of the human intellect to discover the truth of things, there is not much in Hobbes's philosophical scheme to arouse the enthusiasm of the young and ardent, and more than a little which is positively repellent. But there are few writers whose work is more fruitful of suggestions for the matured and reflective intellect which has grown suspicious of all enthusiasm, even of its own, and demands before all things calm and impartial reasoned analysis. Perhaps the best proof of Hobbes's real genius is that even his worst errors are so much more instructive than the truths of lesser men.



## CHAPTER II

### PHILOSOPHY, ITS SCOPE AND METHODS

HOBBS'S main influence on the thought both of his own and of subsequent times has been felt almost exclusively in the domain of Ethics and Politics. He is primarily important to us as the herald of a new epoch in English thinking, an epoch which, we might fairly say, was closed only the other day by the death of Herbert Spencer. When we think of him, it is usually as the first in the long succession of English empirical psychologists, the earliest English writer of many who have sought to found a purely naturalistic system of moral and political science on the basis of biological and psychological fact. But it is equally true that Hobbes ends an epoch. He is the last English philosophical writer, with the single exception of Spencer, to understand the word 'philosophy' in the wide sense put upon it in the Middle Ages, as the systematised and codified body of all rational human knowledge. With his

immediate successor, Locke, begins that distinction between science and philosophy by which the scope of the latter is closely restricted to epistemological inquiries into the conditions and nature of knowledge in general, and psychological investigations into its growth, while the task of extending the contents of our knowledge of the extra-subjective world is made over exclusively to the sciences—a distinction which has ever since, for good and bad, dominated English philosophy. From Hobbes's own point of view, then, his doctrine of Man and Society cannot be fully appreciated unless we consider it, in connection with the rest of his system, as an integral part of that body of deductions from the general laws of motion which constitutes science. For this reason, as well as for the intrinsic value of many of his thoughts on the nature and methods of science, it is essential to examine Hobbes's general theory of the range and the procedure of science before considering his achievements as a theorist in the fields of morals and sociology.

The definition of philosophy, as given at the beginning of the *De Corpore*—our citations are from the English version of 1656—runs thus: 'Philosophy is such knowledge of effects or appearances as we acquire by true ratiocination

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from the knowledge we have first of their causes or generations, and, again, of such causes or generations as may be from knowing first their effects.' Here the words 'by true ratiocination' are intended to exclude from philosophy knowledge directly given in sense perception or resting merely upon unsystematised experience, while the expression 'such causes . . . as *may* be,' in the second clause of the sentence, alludes to Hobbes's view that by reasoning backward from 'effects' to their 'causes,' we can never discover *the* 'cause' of a given 'effect,' but only one or more alternative 'causes' by any one of which the result might have been 'produced.'

Philosophy then is, in short, reasoned knowledge, and, if we ask why we ought to set a value on such knowledge, Hobbes replies, even more emphatically than Bacon, 'for the sake of its practical consequences.' 'The end of knowledge is power, and the use of theorems . . . is for the construction of problems; and lastly, the scope of all speculation is the performing of some action, or thing to be done' (*Concerning Body*, i. 6). In particular, the utility of 'moral and civil philosophy' is to be measured by the calamities which arise from ignorance of it. All the avoidable calamities of human life, says Hobbes, with

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characteristic exaggeration, are due to war. And men go to war, not because they wish to do so, or because they do not know that war is productive of evil effects, but because they do not know the true causes of war and peace. That is, they are uninstructed in the true principles of civil and political obedience, which had, in fact, according to Hobbes, been formulated for the first time in 1642 in his own *De Cive*. A true system of Philosophy, in which the principles of morals and politics should be rigorously deduced from the fundamental axioms of science, would therefore act as a universal peacemaker.

Philosophy, then, is sharply distinguished by its reasoned form from history, the mere record of past experience; 'whereas sense and memory are but knowledge of fact, which is a thing past and irrecoverable, science is the knowledge of consequences and dependence of one fact upon another' (*Leviathan*, c. v.). The peculiarity of philosophy or science is that its results are at once universal and exact. 'Experience concludeth nothing universally,' but 'nothing is produced by reasoning aright but general, eternal, and immutable truths.' It is a notable peculiarity of Hobbes's doctrine that, while he agrees with the ordinary empiricist that 'the first beginnings of

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knowledge are the phantasms of sense and imagination,' he almost entirely neglects the problem of inductive logic, *how* 'general eternal and immutable truths' can be educed from these particular isolated 'phantasms.'

From the definition above given, it follows at once that, since philosophy treats only of 'generations' or causal processes, there can be no philosophical knowledge of any being which has no cause, and consequently no philosophy of anything eternal. Hence, there is no science of God, since God is, by definition, an uncaused and eternal being. Theology is thus, at a stroke, excluded from the range of scientific knowledge. Similarly, since all causation is production of one motion by another, there is no science of anything except bodies; the profession of philosophy is 'to search out the properties of bodies from their generation, or their generation from their properties.' Hobbes will not even allow that we can form any intelligible concept of anything incorporeal, and contends that when God is said by the official Anglican theology to be 'without body,' this is a mere vague expression of reverence. In strictness, according to him, there is no definite concept attached to the name 'God,' and it is on this ground that he criticises Descartes' argu-

ment from my possession of an 'idea of God' to the actual existence of God. Hobbes replies (*Third Objections to the Meditations*), that the inference is worthless, since I have no 'idea' of God at all. "All knowledge of God requires revelation, and revelation needs to be accredited by miracles. Since miracles have ceased, a point on which Hobbes agrees with orthodox Protestants, no one can now claim to be heard when he alleges a divine revelation as a reason for disobedience to his civil sovereign. It is our duty to accept the theology promulgated by the State, not because it is true, but because it is official. 'Religion is not philosophy but law.'

Hobbes's general position as to the limits of science is thus closely akin to that which we should nowadays call positivistic. Science extends only so far as the world of bodies moving in accord with fixed mechanical law, and no further. What distinguishes Hobbes from most modern representatives of this view is that he does not combine it, as they do, with the further assertion that the whole of the knowledge thus acquired is merely 'relative,' or concerned solely with 'phenomena,' which are manifestations of an underlying unknown, and perhaps unknowable, reality. That bodies really and objectively exist,



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and that the laws of their motion can be discovered, he simply assumes as an unquestionable fact; he has no inkling of the deeper problem of Descartes' *Meditations*, how it is possible for the individual mind to be assured of anything outside the circle of its own states.

From the definition of philosophy as the knowledge of bodies, the threefold division of the subject at once follows. For bodies are either natural or artificial. Natural bodies, again, include, among others, one class which is of supreme importance, inasmuch as it is the object of all our psychological study of sensation, thought, and emotion, the bodies of human beings. An artificial body is what we commonly call a society or commonwealth. The society or commonwealth is just as much a single body, and governed just as completely by the general laws of the motion of bodies, as the individual organism. Its only distinctive characteristic is that it is artificial; *i.e.* it owes its origin to the voluntary agreement of the persons who form its constituent members. Hence philosophy, as a whole, falls into three parts, the doctrine of body in general, the doctrine of the human body in particular, the doctrine of the artificial body, or commonwealth. 'Two chief kinds of bodies, and very different from one

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another, offer themselves to such as search after their generation and properties; one whereof, being the work of nature, is called a natural body: the other is called a commonwealth, and is made by the wills and agreement of men. And from these spring the two parts of philosophy called Natural and Civil . . . In the first place, therefore (after I have set down such premisses as appertain to the nature of philosophy in general), I will discourse of bodies natural, in the second of the dispositions and manners of men, and in the third of the civil duties of subjects.'—(*Concerning Body*, i. 9.)

By the premisses which appertain to the nature of philosophy in general are meant, of course, the general principles of logic and method, and it is from the account of them that we have to collect Hobbes's views on the theory of knowledge. Scientific method, then, has two branches, reasoning from general principles (definitions and axioms), to their consequences, or, as Hobbes phrases it, from causes to their effects, and this is *synthesis*; reasoning from the facts to the principles involved, from effects to causes, and this is *analysis*. *Synthesis* and *analysis* thus correspond to our popular distinction between the deductive and inductive uses of logic. Only the former, the



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purely deductive type of reasoning, is rigidly certain and yields perfectly determinate conclusions. The latter is essentially hypothetical, and consists merely in pointing out such principles as would lead deductively to the observed results. Hence Hobbes, like Epicurus, explicitly maintains that different theories as to the 'cause' of an observed fact may be equally true, if each would equally lead to consequences which agree with observed facts. In modern language, his theory of method makes 'induction' to consist simply in the formation of explanatory hypotheses, apart from the further task of complete verification by showing that any explanation other than that adopted would lead to results which conflict with fact. Like Jevons, he regards 'induction' as being merely the inverse operation corresponding to the direct operation of deduction, as division or integration corresponds to multiplication or differentiation. Hence he held that the Royal Society was proceeding on altogether false lines in attempting to advance physical science by direct experiment rather than by reasoning deductively from preassumed general theories. Hence, too, his uniform silence as to the 'inductive' method of Bacon, the avowed object of which was to eliminate the 'anticipation of nature' by the

framing of initial hypotheses altogether from the work of science.

Now the ultimate first principles of deductive science are all, according to Hobbes, *definitions*, that is, statements of the meaning of *names*. Everything in science, therefore, turns upon the original definitions; science is merely the correct deduction of the consequences implied in the giving of *names*. And names, Hobbes holds, were originally given arbitrarily. 'For it is true that, *e.g.* man is a living creature, but it is for this reason, that it pleased men to impose both those names on the same thing' (*Concerning Body*, iii. 8).

This point comes out clearly in the famous definition of a name (*Ib.*, ii. 4): 'A name is a word taken at *pleasure* to serve for a mark which may raise in our minds a thought like to some thought we had before, and which, being pronounced to others, may be to them a sign of what thought the speaker had, or had not, before in his mind.' Consistently with this view, Hobbes adopts an ultra-nominalist position in logic. The only names which directly denote realities are singular names of individual bodies; general terms, or common names, do not directly denote an object at all. There is, *e.g.* no such object as 'man in general.' 'This word universal is never

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the name of anything existent in nature, nor of any idea or phantasm formed in the mind, but always the name of some word or name, so that when a living creature, a stone, a spirit, or any other thing is said to be universal, it is not to be understood that any man, stone, etc., ever was or can be universal, but only that these words are universal names, that is, names common to many things' (*Ib.*, ii. 9). A proposition is 'a speech consisting of two names copulated, by which he that speaketh, signifies he conceives the later name to be the name of the same thing whereof the former is the name' (*Ib.*, iii. 2).

Thus Hobbes's doctrine as to the import of propositions is that their whole meaning is that the predicate is a name of the same thing as the subject, or the case of negative propositions, that the subject and predicate are *not* names for the same thing. He is careful, however, to mitigate the extreme nominalism of this account by adding that the use of the copula in English is to make us think of a *reason* why the two names are both given to the same thing. Searching criticism might here find an occasion for attacking Hobbes out of his own mouth, since this last remark as to the function of the copula clearly sets limits to the alleged arbitrariness of the em-

ployment, if not to the arbitrariness of the invention, of names.

Reasoning now receives an equally nominalist definition. It is, and the phrase sounds curiously prophetic of the modern discovery that logic is really a mathematical calculus, the computation of the consequences of names, and may be regarded as consisting entirely of *addition* (the formation of complex concepts by putting words together), and *subtraction* (*i.e.* abstraction, the formation of more general concepts by analysis of a complex name into its simpler components), *Concerning Body*, i. 2, 3; iv. 6; *Leviathan*, c. iv.).

Now apart from any minor objections which might be raised as to Hobbes's tacitly implied theory of the way in which language has historically developed, this whole account of the nature of reasoning involves an obvious and tremendous difficulty of principle, a difficulty which meets us again in the doctrine of those modern mathematicians and logicians who regard the written or printed symbols of Arithmetic and Algebra as the actual objects with which mathematical thought is concerned. As we have seen, Hobbes holds that the whole body of the conclusions of deductive science is a mere consequence of the initial definitions (a point on which he was afterwards

followed by Locke), and, as he is careful to point out, the sense which the introducer of a new word or other symbol is to put upon his invention is a matter of his own choice. The definition, then, being merely a declaration of the sense in which I intend to employ a hitherto unused word or other sign, is, properly speaking, neither true nor false. As Hobbes himself puts it (*Concerning Body*, vi. 15), it is not necessary to dispute whether definitions are to be admitted or no. For when a master is instructing his scholar, if the scholar understand all the parts of the thing defined which are resolved in the definition, and yet will not admit of the definition, 'there needs no further controversy betwixt them, it being all one as if he refused to be taught.' Since all our conclusions, then, are simply logical consequences of arbitrarily constructed definitions, which are themselves neither true nor false, it would seem to follow that the whole of knowledge is a mere ingenious sporting with puzzles, like the solving of chess problems, the ultimate rules of the game being, like the rules of chess, neither true nor false, but purely arbitrary. In what intelligible sense, then, can our conclusions be said to be themselves true?

It is this difficulty which Leibniz has in his



mind when he urges against the extreme nominalists that though names are *artificial*, they are not *arbitrary*. (For instance, quite different symbols might be chosen to represent the concepts we commonly symbolise by the signs 2, 3, 5, +, =, and in that case the truth we now write in the form  $2+3=5$  would be expressed by a very different set of symbols. But the numerical truth meant, or symbolised, by both groups of signs would be one and the same. For every true proposition, expressed in our familiar notation, about relations between numbers, there would be one, and only one, corresponding proposition in the other set of symbols. The particular signs selected to denote the different numbers, and the different operations which can be performed upon them, may be largely arbitrary, but there is nothing arbitrary about the laws of their combination.)

The secret of Hobbes's mistake, in fact, lies in the insidious error into which he falls about the logical character and function of definitions. It is not true, as he supposes, that *e.g.* in Geometry the definitions are the real premisses from which the theorems are inferred. Technically, as Hobbes himself has seen, a definition is a mere verbal abbreviation, a mere substitution of a single

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hitherto unemployed word, or other symbol, for a more complicated set of words or signs of already known import. Hence you could eliminate the definitions from the science altogether by merely replacing every defined symbol in a demonstration by the group of symbols for which, as its definition declares, it is an abbreviation. The only difference such a proceeding would make would be that our demonstrations would be thus rendered painfully long and cumbrous. This is why Hobbes is perfectly correct in holding that a scientific definition is really neither true nor false, since it is, in fact, not a proposition at all, but a mere convention between different thinkers as to the sense to be put on a particular abbreviation. But what Hobbes does not see is that it follows at once from this correct view of the function of definitions, that the definitions are never the premisses from which our scientific demonstrations are inferred. The real premisses of all demonstrations are partly logical axioms, that is assertions which declare that certain propositions imply formally the truth of certain others, partly postulates, or unprovable existence-theorems, that is assertions that certain objects exist, or have a certain relation to one another. An instance of the former kind of premiss in Euclid is the 'first axiom,' which

states that if the magnitude of  $a$  is the same as that of  $b$ , and the magnitude of  $b$  is the same as that of  $c$ , then it follows that the magnitude of  $a$  is the same as that of  $c$ . Examples of the second kind are the unexpressed postulate that there exists the class of entities called *points*, or the explicitly enunciated postulate of the existence of the straight line (*i.e.* of an entity which is completely determined when two of its points are given). And when we carry our analysis of the presuppositions of demonstrative science far enough we shall always find that just as the ultimate logical axioms are, for the simple reason that they are preconditions of all proof, themselves unprovable, so the ultimate existential postulates, because they are preconditions of all definition, are all assertions of the existence of kinds of entities which are indefinable. Now these ultimate axioms and postulates being thus neither arbitrary, nor mere declarations of the signification of names, we escape the conclusion to which Hobbes's view would lead, that there is, in the end, no sense in asking whether the propositions of science are true or not, and science comes, after all, to be something very different in kind from a curiously complicated chess problem.

To return, however, to the exposition of Hobbes's



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thought. As we have already seen, Hobbes starts with the assumption, as ultimate scientific postulates, of the fundamental propositions of a rigid mechanical materialism. The only things which we really know to exist are bodies, and bodies are only known to us as vehicles of motion. All the facts of external nature and of mental life must therefore, for science, be varieties of motion in the parts of body, and nothing more. Hence a completed philosophy would amount to a vast system of deductions by which all the truths of physical and mental science would be shown to be logical consequences of the ultimate simple laws of motion laid down by mechanics. From the purely philosophical point of view, it is Hobbes's chief merit that he has undertaken the task of performing such a deduction with greater consistency, and a fuller consciousness of what it implies than any writer before or after him; he is the one consistent philosophical materialist in the history of thought, as far as that history is known to us, whose intelligence rises above mediocrity, and whose candour, at the same time, leaves no doubt as to his exact meaning. Hence it is most instructive, as throwing light upon the inherent defects of materialism as an ultimate philosophical standpoint, to observe at what points his initial

postulates fail him. Such a failure occurs, with the consequence that Hobbes is forced to abandon his strictly deductive method, at two critical points in his exposition. When he enters upon the realm of our inner mental life in his account of sensation, he has to abandon the attempt to deduce our perception of the various qualities of bodies, their colours, savours, odours, and the like, from a mathematical theory of the external motions which are commonly called their causes or stimuli, and to accept the correlation of the various sense-qualities with certain external stimuli simply as given and unexplained facts of experience. And in the same way, when he advances to the theory of human conduct, he finds it quite out of the question to exhibit the fundamental passions of human nature as movements of particles within the organism mechanically determined by similar movements on the part of external bodies; the fundamental passions, like the simple, sensible qualities of things, have to be treated as unexplained given facts, and the assertion that they are really motions of particles of the body, and nothing more, remains a mere unproved assertion which is of no significance for the further development of Hobbes's ethical scheme. There is thus no real logical connection between Hobbes's meta-

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physical materialism and his ethical and political doctrine of human conduct; the whole of the latter might, in fact, be equally well grafted upon a pronounced spiritualistic metaphysic, such as that of Descartes. Even the rejection of the doctrine of free will is, in point of fact, based upon assumed psychological grounds which in no way involve the metaphysical postulate that all existence is bodily; in short, the only advantage which Hobbes really derives from his materialism is that it furnishes him with a plausible excuse for his refusal to take theology seriously.

Of Hobbes's theory of the passions it will be time enough to speak in the next chapter. But something must be said here of the effect of his materialistic assumptions upon his doctrine of perception. It is an immediate consequence of the postulate that all physical change is motion that the various apparent sensible qualities of external bodies cannot be objectively real. Colours, smells, and the rest must be mere 'appearances' within the percipient of realities, which are, in truth, mere motions of material particles—'All which qualities, called sensible, are in the object that causeth them but so many several motions of the matter, by which it presseth our organs diversely' (*Leviathan*, c. i.). Hobbes

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is thus at one with Galileo and Descartes, and the rest of the founders of modern mechanical science in proclaiming the doctrine of the 'subjectivity' of sensible—or, as Locke named them—secondary qualities. They are not real attributes of external things, but simply effects, produced by the action of external things upon the 'mind' or the 'nervous system' of the percipient. But Hobbes does not stop at this point. As a consistent materialist, he is bound to hold that the mind or nervous system is, like everything else, a body, and consequently that the only effect that can be produced upon it by any external agent is the same kind of effect which one external agent can produce on another, a modification of its previous motions. The sensible quality, *e.g.* a colour, must not merely be a mere subjective effect of external motion, it must itself, as a subjective effect, be a motion, and nothing more. So he adds immediately after the words just quoted, 'Neither in us that are pressed are they anything else but divers motions; (for motion produceth nothing but motion).' Thus we are left to face the paradox that the whole world of perceived sensible qualities is an illusion, while there is not, and on the principles of strict materialism cannot possibly be, any one to be illuded. Colours, tones, smells,

*The illusion is  
just a motion in a body*

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tastes, have first been declared to be subjective effects produced upon the individual percipient by the impact of particles themselves devoid of all quality; then, since it has to be recognised that, according to materialism, the subject in which these effects are produced must be itself just one collection of such particles among others, it is announced that the effects themselves cannot really be there. If the average materialist stops short of enunciating this intolerable paradox, it is only because he is so far Hobbes's inferior in logical power, or in candour, or in both.

The conception of the subjectivity of sensible qualities is still so commonly regarded as an established result of modern science that it is worth our while to pause over it for a few moments, and to ask whether it can be maintained in a form which does not lead to the Hobbian paradox. Suppose that Hobbes had so far relaxed his materialism as to recognise the real existence of immaterial 'states of consciousness,' might he not have held, without any paradoxical consequences, that what we commonly call the secondary or sensible qualities of external things are in truth 'states of our own consciousness,' which are caused by the action of an external world of bodies totally devoid of



quality? Such a view was widely current in the ancient philosophical schools, and was revived in Hobbes's own day by Galileo and Descartes, from the latter of whom it passed as an almost unquestioned axiom into modern science. Yet it is clear, I think, that the doctrine will not bear serious examination. The very ground upon which the sensible qualities are declared to be subjective, to be 'in us' and not 'in the things outside us,' is the assumption that all the processes of the physical world, however various they may seem to be, are in actual fact purely mechanical. If this principle is true, it must hold just as much for the living organism, which, after all, is just one body among others, as for everything else. The effects of a stimulus upon the organism, whatever they may seem to be, must in reality be as entirely mechanical as the stimulus itself, as Hobbes very properly said. Even if a colour or a sound could be said without absurdity to be a 'state of consciousness,' the principles of a mechanical philosophy would absolutely forbid our calling that state an 'effect' of an external stimulus. The 'effect' of the stimulus would have to be simply the *ex hypothesi* purely mechanical changes induced by it in the nervous system, and with these changes the

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'state of consciousness' would have really no discoverable relation but the temporal relation of simultaneity. The whole of our intellectual life would become, as it has sometimes been called, an 'epiphenomenon,' a series of events occurring simultaneously with certain mechanical changes in the world of bodies, but standing absolutely outside the series of causes and effects.

And, if we carried analysis a step further. we should at once be confronted by a still more formidable difficulty. For it would readily become apparent that, whatever sensible qualities may be, they are certainly not 'states' of a mind. When, in common parlance, I am said to see a blue flower, it is really ridiculous to say that in truth it is my mind which is blue. My judgment 'that flower is blue' may be true, or it may be false, but in either case one thing is quite clear. It is not 'being blue,' but 'believing that the flower is blue' which is, in that moment, a state of my perceiving mind. And this simple reflection is in itself enough to dispose of the whole doctrine of the 'subjectivity of sensible qualities.' There are really only two alternative possibilities in the case. Either all the propositions in which a sensible quality is ascribed to a thing are merely false, as Hobbes's account logically implies, or



else there are at least some bodies which really have the sensible qualities of colour, savour, and so forth. It would be no way of escape to suggest that perhaps what is really blue is neither the colour nor my mind, but some part of my optical apparatus, *e.g.* the stimulated region of my retina. For, on such a theory, there is at least one body which really has the sensible quality, viz. my retina. But, if so, why not other bodies as well, and what becomes of the postulate that the only objectively real properties of body are mechanical?

The fact is that Hobbes, like all the philosophers who have taught the subjectivity of sensible qualities, commits the grave error of trying to combine two really inconsistent conceptions of the relation between the external world and our perception. He tries to think of the world of bodies as being at once the *cause* of perception, and also the *object* which perception apprehends. | What our last two paragraphs have gone to show is that both these conceptions cannot be true at once. If the external world is the cause of perception, it cannot be the object apprehended in perception; in fact, perception, in that case, can have no object at all, and all supposed knowledge about anything must be a mere illusion, as was pretty clearly seen by Hume.

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On the other hand, since the external world is certainly the object of our perception (how far that perception is correct or erroneous makes no difference to the argument), the relation of the world to the perceiving subject cannot possibly be a causal one. When we have once grasped this truth, we shall see that the accuracy of our perception of sensible qualities of body is a question to be argued, in every special case, on its own merits, and cannot be impugned by any general *à priori* arguments drawn from the principle of causality. Nor does this conclusion in any way conflict with the fullest recognition of the right of physical science to treat the external world, for its own purposes, as if it were devoid of sensible qualities, and consisted merely, let us say, of vibratory motions of different rates of frequency. All that is required to justify such a proceeding is that there should be a uniform one-to-one correlation between each sensible quality (*e.g.* each shade of colour), and a particular kind of vibration; we may then treat the colour, for all purposes of mathematical physics, as if it actually were the vibration, just as, in ordinary analytical geometry, we can treat a point in a plane as if it were actually a couple of numbers. Where the physicist so often goes

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wrong, when he strays into the domain of philosophy, is in hastily assuming that two things which have a ~~one-one~~ correspondence to each other are really the same thing. As for the further *à posteriori* arguments by which Hobbes tries to establish the subjectivity of sense-qualities, *e.g.* in the first chapter of *Leviathan*, they are all of the type since made familiar by Berkeley and his followers (appeals to dreams, to hallucinations, etc.). Their conclusive force, whatever it may be, would be equally great if we applied them to the 'primary' mechanical properties of body, or even to Hobbes's supreme reality, motion itself, since all these may be the subject of dreams and hallucinations, just as colours or smells might be. In truth, all that is proved by arguments of this type would seem to be that it is possible to make erroneous judgments about external things, a proposition which no sober philosophy is called on to deny.

In one respect Hobbes goes beyond most of the English writers who have since espoused the doctrine that sensible qualities are subjective; he maintains the same thing about space and time themselves. They also are merely 'phantasms,' that is, they are not 'the accident or affection of any body'; they are 'not in the things without us,

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but only in the thought of the mind' (*Concerning Body*, vii. 3). More precisely, space is 'the phantasm of a thing existing without the mind simply; that is to say, that phantasm in which we consider no other accident, but only that it appears without us'; time is 'the phantasm of before and after in motion' (*Ibid.*, vii. 2, 3). The ground given by Hobbes for this assertion is that if the whole world could be suddenly annihilated except one man, that man would still retain his consciousness of space and time. I confess I do not see that this consideration proves anything, except perhaps that space and time are not bodies, nor do I see how Hobbes could think that motion (the successive occupation of different positions by the same thing), is objectively real, and yet hold that space and time are mere subjective ideas of our own. His statement, it should be noted, bears no real resemblance to Kant's famous doctrine of the 'ideality' of the forms of perception. Space and time are regarded by him not as universal forms of perception impressed by the mind upon a 'manifold' of sensations received from without, but merely as constituent elements of the 'manifold' itself. The whole distinction between a formal element in perception, which comes from the perceiving subject, and a material element

contributed by the external world, belongs to a later and more developed stage of the theory of knowledge. It is, indeed, a signal advance upon the Kantian position to recognise clearly that the 'formal' element in perception is no less objective than the 'material,' but the recognition seems inconsistent with sensationalism as a theory of knowledge. Hobbes is able to be consistently sensationalist precisely because it does not occur to him to draw any distinction between the 'formal' and the 'material' in our knowledge.

## CHAPTER III

### EMPIRICAL PSYCHOLOGY—THE NATURE OF MAN

WE may now proceed to consider the main outlines of the analysis of cognition and volition which has earned for Hobbes the well-merited title of 'founder of empirical psychology,' that chief contribution of the English-speaking peoples to mental science. This analysis will be found by the English reader most fully set forth in two works, the *Human Nature* (the first part of the treatise on the *Elements of Law* originally composed in 1640), and the opening chapters of *Leviathan* (published in 1651). We must bear in mind, however, that Hobbes is chiefly interested in the psychology of the individual mind less for its own sake than because it furnishes him with a logical foundation for his naturalistic doctrine of ethics and politics; his psychology is consequently only worked out so far as is necessary for the achievement of this ulterior end.

Hobbes, as we have seen, does not attempt to



deduce the principles of psychology, let alone these of ethics and politics, from the general doctrine of motion, but falls back upon our immediate experience of the main facts of human nature as we find them in ourselves. He is, so to say, an empiricist *malgré lui*, and it is one of the entertaining ironies of history that the English philosopher who, of all others, is most strongly insistent upon the deductive character of genuine science should be chiefly remembered by that part of his work which is most flagrantly inconsistent with his own conception of strictly scientific method. From the axiom that neither within nor without is there any reality but motion there is, in truth, no road to moral and political science.

Hobbes starts, in his doctrine of man, from the usual empiricist assumption that all mental life is a development from beginnings in sensation; 'for there is no conception in a man's mind which hath not, at first, totally or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense. The rest are derived from that original' (*Leviathan*, c. i.). Sensation, as we have seen, is, according to him, a motion caused in these organs by previous motion in some external body. Why the sensible qualities, thus begotten, are supposed to belong to external bodies he explains by the theory that all



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sensation gives rise to motor reaction from the heart, which he, like the Aristotelians, regards as the centre of the nervous system, towards the periphery of the body. It is the outward-flowing direction of these reactions which causes sensible objects to appear *without* us,—a crude version of the now seriously discredited doctrine of ‘feelings of innervation.’ He immediately adds a doctrine of the relativity of sensation. Sensation requires a constant variety of stimuli; persistent exposure to an unvarying stimulus would readily give rise to total unconsciousness, ‘it being almost one for a man to be always sensible of one and the same thing and not to be sensible at all of anything’ (*Concerning Body*, xxv. 5). That is, consciousness depends upon contrast. From sensation Hobbes goes on next to derive imagination and memory. Imagination is simply ‘decaying sense,’ *i.e.* the persistence, in a less intense form, of the organic process excited by a stimulus after the stimulus itself has been withdrawn. This persistence itself, again, is a consequence of what Newton was afterwards to call the ‘first law of motion.’ ‘When a body is once in motion, it moveth (unless something else hinder it) eternally, and whatsoever hindereth it, cannot in an instant, but in time, and by degrees quite extinguish it. And as we see in the

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water, though the winds cease, the waves give not over rolling for a long time after; so also it happeneth in that motion which is made in the internal parts of a man, then, when he sees, dreams, etc. For after the object is removed, or the eye shut, we still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure than when we see it. . . . Imagination therefore is nothing but *decaying sense*' (*Leviathan*, c. ii.). How, in the general subjectivity of all sensation, we are to know whether the 'object' has really been 'withdrawn' or not is a problem which Hobbes would scarcely have found it easy to solve. Memory is now explained to be simply imagination of what is past. 'When we would express the decay, and signify that the sense is fading, old, and past, it is called *Memory*. So that imagination and memory are but one thing, which for divers considerations hath divers names' (*Ib.*).

It is clear that we are here again confronted by a difficulty which Hobbes's superficial appeals to physical analogies cannot conceal. For imagination is by no means exclusively of things past; we can imagine our future as readily as we can remember our past, and we often divert ourselves by imagining a state of things which neither has existed nor will ever exist. Now how do we

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come to make these distinctions between different imaginations if imagination and memory are merely two names for the same thing looked at from two different points of view? Why is not all imagination indistinguishable from reminiscence? In other words, what a psychological analysis of memory ought to account for is not the mere fact that we can imagine what is actually past, but the fact that, in doing so, we recognise the events imagined as belonging to the past and not to the future or to no time at all. The secret of Hobbes's failure to give any satisfactory account of memory is not hard to find, and it is also the secret of much more that is defective in his psychological analysis. What must happen to any really consistent sensationalist in psychology has happened to him. In his derivation of mental life from passively received sensations he has forgotten the presence of selective attention as an ever-present factor which actively determines the course of all mental processes. It is only when we have learned to distinguish that from which attention is turning away from that towards which it is moving that we acquire a basis for the distinction between imagination of what is 'no longer' and imagination of what is 'not yet.'

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Hobbes next advances to the analysis of complex trains of thought (*Leviathan*, c. iii.). He begins by laying down the general doctrine of 'association of ideas,' giving a crude account of the psycho-physical dependence of the process upon the formation of 'paths of conduction' in the nervous system, and recognising 'association by contiguity' more explicitly than 'association by resemblance,' though the latter is not entirely overlooked. 'When a man thinketh on anything whatsoever, his next thought after is not altogether so casual as it seems to be. Not every thought to every thought succeeds indifferently. But . . . we have no transition from one imagination to another whereof we never had the like before in our senses. The reason whereof is this. All fancies are motions within us, relics of those made in the sense; and those motions that immediately succeeded one another in the sense continue also together after sense, insomuch as the former coming again to take place and be predominant, the later followeth by coherence of the matter moved.' He distinguishes, however, between mere random association and thought guided or regulated by the presence of a definite end or purpose which controls the formation of associations, *e.g.* the orderly thinking out of a series of steps towards

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the gratification of a given desire. This latter ought really to present a difficulty to him, since it most obviously involves the presence of purposive attention as actively determining the current of thought, and leading to sequences in 'imagination' quite independent of previous sequences 'in our senses,' and it seems manifest that such attention cannot be analysed into a mere succession of subjective effects of physical stimuli. On Hobbes's theory, as on any theory which treats association as more than a subordinate factor in determining the course of thought, whenever we think of a given thing *A*, our next thought should be of a thing *B*, which is either very like *A* or has been most commonly perceived or thought of in close connection with *A*. In actual fact, in proportion as our thinking is truly rational, or, as Hobbes would say, regulated, the *B* which the thought of *A* calls up is that which it is most *relevant* to our present object to think of next, and this *B* may be something quite unlike *A* and something which has never been thought of in this particular connection with *A* before. It is really only unregulated, random thinking which is dominated by association; in an orderly train of purposive thinking association appears, as often as



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not, as a disturbing factor and source of pure irrelevance.

Hobbes now proceeds (*Leviathan*, c. vi.) to a similar analysis of voluntary motions, *i.e.* the whole conative side of mental life. Like most pre-Kantian psychologists he reckons feeling and emotion among the forms of conation. Conation is, in every case, nothing but incipient motion within the nervous system, and such incipient outward-directed reaction Hobbes calls by the general name *endeavour*. Endeavour, again, has two contrasted directions. It is either endeavour *to* or *from* a perceived object, the words 'to' and 'from' being understood quite literally of direction in space. Endeavour towards an object is what we call *appetite* or *desire*; endeavour from an object is called *aversion*. Other names for the two directions of endeavour are love and hate. 'Because going, speaking, and the like voluntary motions depend always upon a precedent thought of *whither*, *which way*, and *what*, it is evident that the imagination is the first internal beginning of all voluntary motions. And although unstudied men do not conceive any motion at all to be there, where the thing moved is invisible, or the space it is moved in is (for the shortness of it) insensible; yet that doth not hinder but



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that such motions are. . . . These small beginnings of motion, within the body of man, before they appear in walking, speaking, striking, and other visible actions, are commonly called ENDEAVOUR. This endeavour, when it is toward something which causes it, is called APPETITE, or DESIRE; . . . and when the endeavour is fromward something, it is generally called AVERSION. . . . That which men desire, they are also said to LOVE, and to HATE those things for which they have aversion. So that desire and love are the same thing; save that by desire we always signify the absence of the object, by love most commonly the presence of the same. So also by aversion we signify the absence, and by hate the presence, of the object' (*Ib.*, c. vi.).

Whatever is the object of appetite or desire to a man he calls *good*; whatever is the object of aversion he calls *evil*. Hence, since the desires of different men, and even of the same man at different times, are very various, *good* and *evil* are purely relative terms, and there can be no common measure of them, except in civil society, where they are determined by the command of the ruler; hence, again, the absolute necessity for the civil sovereign and his laws, if moral anarchy is to be avoided. 'These words . . . are ever

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used with relation to the person that useth them, there being nothing simply and absolutely so, nor any common rule of good and evil to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves, but from the person of the man (when there is no commonwealth), or (in a commonwealth) from the person that representeth it, or from an arbitrator or judge, whom men disagreeing shall by consent set up, and make his sentence the rule thereof' (*Leviathan*, c. vi.). In other words, there is no such thing as a moral law, equally binding upon all persons, except in an organised political community, and in such a community itself what we call the 'moral' law is a consequence, a reflex in the consciousness of the individual man, of the habit of obedience to the commands of a political ruler.

It follows from this purely naturalistic conception of the primary meaning of the words 'good' and 'evil,' that 'of the voluntary acts of every man the object is some good to himself' (*Ib.*, c. xiv.). The proposition is, in fact, tautologous, since, according to Hobbes's definition of good, good means what a man desires, and, as we are to see immediately, his psychology is unable to draw any real distinction between desire, or 'appetite,' and volition. Thus, on the

ground that 'the object of a man's desire is the object of his desire,' Hobbes bases the conclusion that all voluntary action is, in the last resort, purely egoistic, though it appears that the 'good' at which an action aims may, in some cases, be the suppression of the pain we feel at the sight of another person's suffering, and room is thus made for a limited and rather inferior kind of benevolence. It should further be noted that Hobbes oddly confounds pleasure and pain with the consciousness of appetite and of aversion respectively, a gross blunder in analysis which is forced on him by the necessity of bringing all features of our mental life under one of the two heads, cognition and motor impulse. Similarly, he is obliged to falsify his analysis of deliberation and volition. Deliberation is nothing more than a succession of alternating impulses or appetites towards and from the same object. 'When in the mind of man appetites and aversions, hopes and fears, concerning one and the same thing arise alternately, and divers good and evil consequences of the doing or omitting the thing propounded come successively into our thoughts, so that sometimes we have an appetite towards it, sometimes an aversion from it . . . the whole sum of desires, aversions, hopes, and fears con-

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tinued till the thing be either done, or thought impossible, is that we call DELIBERATION' (*Leviathan*, c. vi.). It follows, of course, that deliberation is no prerogative of man, but common to him with the 'brutes.' *Will* is simply the last member of this series, the appetite or aversion which immediately precedes the visible bodily reaction. 'The last appetite or aversion immediately adhering to the action, or to the omission thereof, is that we call the *Will* . . . and beasts, that have deliberation, must necessarily also have will' (*Ib.*).

From the definition of good and evil, it follows that Hobbes adopts a purely and crudely determinist view on the question of free will. A man inevitably aims at that which at the moment appears good to himself; in fact all that we mean by saying that it appears good to him is that he does so aim at it. Hobbes's essay on Liberty and Necessity still remains one of the clearest and most forcible statements of the case for this kind of rigid determinism against any admission of [contingency or genuine freedom in human action.

This whole theory of volition obviously suffers from grave psychological defects, which, in their turn, lead to equally grave ethical and sociological errors. The secret source of Hobbes's worst

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mistakes in ethical theory must be sought in the absurd inadequacy of his analysis of deliberation. From the standpoint of a really thorough psychology, nothing can be more ludicrous than his confusion of rational deliberation with a mere see-saw of conflicting animal impulses. Rational deliberation, as distinguished from mere hesitation, implies the successive examination of alternative possibilities of action with a preconceived plan or purpose which is already fixed in its main outlines, but receives further special determination as to its details by each of these successive comparisons; the final selection of one of the alternatives as the line to be followed is an act totally different in its psychical character from the blind translation into overt movement of an irrational impulse. Hence it is that we can actually desire what we do not will, and will much that we do not desire. Thus we find in Hobbes's account of volition precisely the same blindness to the importance of selective attention which we had found in his analysis of cognition. This has a further most momentous consequence for his ethical and social doctrine. From the identification of volition with mere animal appetite it follows that civilisation can provide us with no new *objects* of volition, it can merely increase our



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command over the means of gratifying desires which remain identical with those of the savage, or supply additional motives, such as, *e.g.* fear of the police or the gallows, strong enough to check the gratification of such desires. We are all still savages at heart, though we are better informed than the savage as to the probable consequences of gratifying our appetites, and have also contrived to attach artificially various new unpleasant consequences to the gratification of some of them. Not, of course, that Hobbes was himself ethically on the level of a savage; the acquisition of a rational comprehension of life to which Hobbes's labours were so unremittingly devoted, is itself an object of desire impossible to a mere savage, but for such objects his crude psychological analysis has provided no place. It is a direct consequence of this analysis, and at the same time the real foundation of his whole moral and social theory, that competition for objects of desire which can only be enjoyed by one man on the condition that all others are prevented from enjoying them, is still, as it always has been, the law of human life, and that this competition will always make ordered society impossible unless there is a ruler with the admitted right to set limits to it and the power to enforce his regula-



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tions by penalties. However strongly some of the facts of the period of revolution through which England was passing during Hobbes's manhood might suggest such a conception, it should be manifest to a dispassionate student of human history that it does infinitely less than justice to the extent to which, as civilisation advances, the objects of human desire become more and more of a non-competitive kind, or of a kind which are positively unattainable by one man except on the condition of their equal attainment by his fellows.

Hobbes develops these portentous ethical consequences of his psychology in much detail in the eleventh and thirteenth chapters of *Leviathan*. The supreme aim of every man is to obtain power, i.e. an assured command over the means of future gratification of desire, the reason why this passion persists so obstinately throughout life being not so much that man is never content with the degree of satisfaction he has already attained, as the uncertainty whether he will continue to retain it undiminished. 'In the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this is not always that a man hopes for a more

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intensive delight, . . . or that he cannot be content with a moderate power, but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well which he hath present without the acquisition of more.' (*Leviathan* c. xi.)

Now Hobbes also holds that there is no great natural difference between one man and another either in physical or mental capacity: 'As to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederacy with others that are in the same danger with himself. And as to the faculties of the mind . . . I find yet a greater equality amongst men than that of strength.' (*Ib.*, c. xiii.). Consequently, the natural state of man, *i.e.* the condition into which he is born and in which he remains, so far as he does not artificially put an end to it by the creation of a political system, is one of universal competition, or as Hobbes, who likes to give his ideas the most startling and provocative wording, phrases it, one of 'war of every man against every man,' in which there is no moral law, since the recognition of moral law is only possible among men living in civil society, and respecting their mutual rights and duties. 'To this war of every man against every man this also is consequent, that nothing

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can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice. Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues. . . . It is consequent also to the same condition that there be no propriety (*i.e. property*), no dominion, no mine and thine distinct, but only that to be every man's that he can get, and for so long as he can get keep it' (*Ib.*). This state of universal anarchy, we must remember, is not in the least Hobbes's ideal, as it has sometimes been falsely represented to be by unscrupulous controversialists; on the contrary, he abhors it, and is at great pains to point out its horrors. So long as it lasts, there can be no settled industry or commerce, no science, no arts or letters, 'and, which is worst of all, continuous fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short' (*Ib.*). The salvation of man, in fact, as we shall see, depends on the fact that though nature has placed him in so evil a condition, she has also endowed him with 'a possibility to come out of it.' Whatever we may think of Hobbes's analysis of human nature, it must not be forgotten for a moment that its object is not the repudiation of law and morality,

but the vindication of them as the only safeguards against general anarchy and misery.

In proof of the correctness of the dark picture thus drawn of what human life would be without a firmly established political authority to protect men against one another and against their own anti-social appetites, Hobbes appeals (1) to the actual condition of savages; (2) to the absence of all moral restraint shown in the mutual relations of independent states, who have no common superior, towards each other; and (3), with special reference to the calumniators who charged him with a desire to undermine the authority of the existing moral law, to the precautions which men take against one another even in settled and civilised states. He thus fairly retorts that he only puts into words what is implied in the conduct of his critics themselves when they bar their chests, lock their doors, or carry arms when on a journey.

Hobbes's account of the 'state of nature' is, of course, as is shown in particular by the seventeenth chapter of *Leviathan*, expressly intended to contradict the doctrine of Aristotle, revived and made popular in his own time by the famous work of Grotius, *De Jure Belli et Pacis*, that man is 'naturally a political animal,' i.e. that the rudiments of sociability and social organisation are

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never absent from any group of human beings living together. This implies, contrary to Hobbes's psychological analysis, that human impulses are *not* exclusively egoistic. So Hobbes reverts to a notion ultimately derived from the old Greek sophists, who taught that morality is the result of 'convention,' the notion that mankind originally existed in a 'state of nature,' which was one of sheer lawlessness, and that all settled morality is the result of habituation to obedience to political rules, which must have been originally set up by voluntary agreement or contract. It is easy to point out that Hobbes exaggerates the extent to which morality is a mere effect of civil obedience, and to show, in the light of later research, that even savages, who have no settled political organisation, really possess a rudimentary morality based on traditional tribal custom. It is equally true that he exaggerates the defects even of the seventeenth century, when he maintains that independent nations recognise *no* moral restrictions whatever in their dealings with their neighbours. Yet his reflections on the character of international morality, as well as on the precautions taken even by the citizen of a law-abiding community against his fellows, retain even to-day a great deal of unpleasant significance. We are, after all, in



many things nearer the savage than we like to think, and it is well that we should not be allowed to forget the fact.

And it is, at least, an important part of the truth, that our moral codes are too largely merely the effect of unreasoned acquiescence in long established custom, while there can be no doubt that Hobbes is much nearer the truth than the sentimental writers before and after him, who have glorified the relatively lawless condition of the pre-civilised man as a golden age of superior innocence or virtue. And there is an element of truth in Hobbes's polemic against Aristotle's conception of the way in which the family has widened into the village community, and the village community into the city or nation, by a process of peaceful expansion. We know enough now of the steps by which historical Greece came into existence to be sure that what lay behind the formation of the Greek *polis* was, more often than not, invasion, conquest, massacre, and the anarchy produced by the violent subversion of older settled 'morality.' If we abandon the empty dream of ever discovering historical information as to the 'primitive' condition of mankind, and content ourselves with the more modest question, What state of things preceded the growth of that



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which we call Western civilisation, whether Hellenic or Germanic, we shall find that Hobbes has, after all, given us a large part, though not the whole, of the truth, especially if we take his picture, with his own qualifying remark that 'it was never generally so all over the world,' and that his prime purpose is not to write ancient history, but to show by philosophical analysis 'what manner of life there would be where there were no common power to fear, by the manner of life which men that have formerly lived under a peaceful government use to degenerate into a civil war' (*Leviathan*, c. xiii.).

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MAKING OF THE LEVIATHAN

WE have seen, in the last chapter, what is Hobbes's conception of the 'state of nature,' the condition in which man found himself at the dawn of civilisation, and into which he tends to degenerate when the bonds of political allegiance are gravely relaxed. It is a condition in which the machinery provided by government for the restraint of men's fundamentally anti-social impulses is entirely absent, and in which there is nothing to take its place. How, then, could any number of men ever pass out of this state of anarchy into a state of settled order? Hobbes replies that there is a possibility to escape from the state of nature into one of civil society which is founded partly on men's passions, partly on men's reason. Partly on their passions, since among these there are several which make for peace and orderly existence, such as 'fear of death, desire of such things as are necessary to com-

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modious living, and a hope by their industry to obtain them.' (*Leviathan*, c. xiii.) Partly on reason, since) it is reason which suggests to mankind the proper means of securing gratification for these unbellicose passions, or as Hobbes puts it, 'suggesteth convenient articles of peace upon which men may be drawn to agreement'—(*Ib.*). We might, perhaps, ask how men living by the unregulated promptings of egoistic appetite ever come to listen to these 'suggestions' of reason, but here, too, Hobbes is ready with an answer. We, all of us, he says, have our calmer moments when rational reflection is undisturbed by passion, and it is then that the voice which suggests 'articles of peace' makes itself heard.

Like the great majority of the political theorists from Hooker in the sixteenth century to Rousseau in the eighteenth, Hobbes thus assumes that the transition from savagery to civil society must have begun with an express agreement or contract, the so-called 'social compact.' Hence with him, as with the others, it becomes the first object of political theory to discover the terms of this original contract—the 'articles of peace' already mentioned—since it is by these terms that we have to ascertain the limits of the rightful authority of political rulers. <The ruler is legit

mately entitled to just so much authority over his subjects, and no more, as can be logically deduced from the examination of the terms of the contract by which civil subjection was first instituted. Whatever in the practice of actual rulers is not covered by these terms is usurpation. This method of deducing the rights of a government over its subjects from a supposed original contract, which had, in point of fact, come down to the thinkers of the sixteenth century from the mediæval legists and schoolmen, who were seeking a rational basis for their various theories of the division of power between the Pope and the secular authorities, or between the Pope and the general councils, received its death-blow towards the end of the eighteenth century from Bentham and Burke, both of whom insist, in different ways, that the rights of governments must be based on the actual needs of society, and not on any theory of the primitive rights of man. Bentham's arguments, which will be found in his *Fragment on Government*, are mainly directed against Blackstone's attempt to determine the rights of the British Crown by deductions from the compact between king and people supposed to be made in the coronation oath, Burke's, against the onslaught of the French Revolution,

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acting in the name of the 'rights of man' upon the vested interests, which he chooses to regard as established 'rights,' of the nobility and clergy. In the nineteenth century, the growth of historical research into social origins made the conception of government as having arisen at a definite time by means of a definite voluntary compact even more unreal, by revealing the enormous extent to which definite political institutions have arisen out of an earlier stage of 'customary' law. Indeed, when we look the matter squarely in the face, it becomes evident that free association by voluntary agreement belongs to the culmination rather than to the beginnings of civilisation, and that the recognition of the binding force of such agreements presupposes the existence of a highly organised public opinion against their violation, so that contract depends upon society more than society upon contract. It is therefore quite impossible for us to take Hobbes's account of the compact by which savagery is ended and civilised life begun as serious historical fact. Yet it is possible to suspect that the reaction against theories of the origin of government in contract may perhaps have been carried too far even on the historical side. History itself, at least, gives us reason to believe that many a famous community

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has sprung from combinations of 'broken men,' relics, in a period of general disintegration, from many distinct ruined tribes or cities, who have somehow been thrown together and entered into a new alliance among themselves, and in such cases the new community must clearly have rested upon the voluntary agreement to unite in mutual support. But, in any case, the substance of Hobbes's reasoned plea for absolutism is quite independent of the largely mythical form in which it is clothed by the author. However governments originate, it is at least true that their permanency depends upon the recognition by governors and governed alike of certain general principles defining the functions of the governor and the obligations of the governed, and such recognition may not unsuitably be represented to the imagination as an implicit bargain. These principles Hobbes and the seventeenth century publicists in general call by a name borrowed from the Roman lawyers, who in their turn had borrowed it from the Stoic philosophers, the 'laws of nature,' the curious result of this appeal to the terminology of the Roman jurists being that, in effect, the theorists of the 'social contract' contrive to apply to political institutions of a very un-Roman character the doctrines of the Roman



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law of corporations. There is, of course, no inconsistency between the phrase 'laws of nature' and Hobbes's doctrine that a law, in the sense of a command by a superior, is impossible until the creation of a public authority to give the command, since Hobbes is careful to explain that 'laws of nature' are not commands, but 'rules of reason,' true universal propositions as to the conditions upon which settled wellbeing is obtainable. They are laws in the sense in which we apply the name to the principle of Excluded Middle or to that of the syllogism, not in the sense in which it is given to the Statute of Mortmain or the British North America Act: 'A law of nature (*lex naturalis*), is a precept, or general rule found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same, and to omit that by which he thinketh it may best be preserved' (*Leviathan*, c. xiv.). Hobbes's employment of the word 'forbidden' in this sentence is, of course, metaphorical. His meaning is simply that since every man desires to live, reflection shows us that it would be irrational to endanger our lives or to fail to protect them. It is in this, and not in any mere idealistic sense, that we have to understand the declaration, in

the first chapter of the *De Corpore Politico*, that the law of nature is identical with reason. It is not that reason is thought of as supplying us with ends of action: the ends of action are already given by the fundamental brute passions and appetites. What reason does is to indicate general rules as to the means by which such foregone ends may be most certainly obtained.

Of such 'general rules found out by reason,' there are, according to Hobbes, a considerable number, but all are deducible from a single supreme rule, 'that every man ought to endeavour peace as far as he has hope of obtaining it, and where he cannot obtain it, that he may seek and use all helps and advantages of war.' The first branch of which rule containeth the first and fundamental *law of nature, which is to seek peace and follow it*; the second the sum of the *right of nature, which is, by all means we can to defend ourselves*' (*Leviathan*, c. xiv.). (Of course, by saying that we 'ought' to seek peace, Hobbes means no more than that, in virtue of the hazards and dangers of the 'war of all against all,' it is manifestly to our advantage to do so where we can.) An immediate corollary, which figures as the second law of nature, is that each of us should

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be willing, when the rest are equally willing, to abandon the general claim to act exactly as he thinks fit, so far as the renunciation is necessary for peace; 'that a man be willing, when others are so too, as far forth as for peace and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things, and be contented with so much liberty against other men as he would allow other men against himself' (*Ib.*) Briefly, then, the second law is 'do not to others what you are not prepared to allow them to do to you,' a precept which Hobbes, characteristically enough, confuses with the 'golden rule' of the Gospel. It is upon this rule that the whole possibility of contract, and, consequently, according to Hobbes, of political society, depends. For what the rule provides for is the laying aside by each member of a body of men of some part of his original right, as described in the first of Hobbes's 'rules of reason,' to act exactly as he thinks fit. Now rights laid aside are either merely renounced, or, when they are resigned for the benefit of an expressly designated person or persons, transferred to that person or persons. Such transference, being a voluntary act, is necessarily interested, since the object of every voluntary act is some good to myself. The contracting

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parties, then, in every case, act each with a view to his own ultimate advantage. Also, since there are certain things for the surrender of which no man can receive an equivalent, there are things which cannot be made the subjects of contract, rights which cannot be transferred. A man cannot *e.g.* divest himself of the right to resist an assault upon his life, or an attempt to wound or imprison him. More generally, since the whole object of a transference of rights is to obtain an increased security of life and the means of enjoying life, no act or word of mine can reasonably be interpreted as showing an intention of divesting myself of the means of self-preservation. These considerations will meet us again as furnishing some limits even to the power of the sovereign.

Hobbes now proceeds to deduce from this second law a third, which is the immediate foundation of the rest of his social theory. When two parties make a bargain for their mutual advantage, it frequently happens that one of them is called upon to perform his part of the contract first and to trust the other to discharge his part at some future time. In this case the contract is called, from the point of view of the second party, a covenant. From the second law

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of nature we can then deduce a third, which Hobbes treats as the foundation of all moral obligation, 'that men perform their covenants made' (*Leviathan*, c. xv.). This follows, because if I break my agreement with you, then, since your object in the original agreement was to secure some good to yourself, and my failure to perform what I undertook has frustrated that object, you have no longer any inducement to fulfil your part of the bargain. Thus the whole purpose of making covenants has been defeated; 'covenants are in vain, and but empty words, and, the right of all men to all things remaining, we are still in the condition of war' (*Ib.*). On this law of the sacredness of a covenant depends the distinction of justice from injustice, and, indirectly, the whole of social morality, since 'the definition of injustice is no other than the not performance of covenant. And whatsoever is not unjust is just.' (*Ib.* Note, incidentally, that Hobbes thus, like Schopenhauer, treats wrong-doing as a concept logically prior to right-doing.) This definition explains what Hobbes had meant by saying that in 'a state of nature' there can be no injustice. Injustice is breach of covenant, but the mutual trust upon which the making of covenants depends, is only possible when there



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is a coercive power which can affect breaches of covenant with penalties severe enough to make it to my interest to abstain from them, *i.e.* under a civil government. For the same reason it is only under civil government that there can be property. It is a natural question why, if the motive for loyalty to my agreements is always some prospect of advantage to myself, I should be morally bound to keep them in cases where treachery promises to be still more advantageous. The fact of the obligation Hobbes does not dispute; he even maintains expressly that a promise to a brigand to pay a certain sum on condition of being released is binding unless declared invalid by a properly constituted court of law; but he is not altogether successful in the reasoning by which he supports his view. Partly he replies that a promise-breaker is *not* likely to gain in the long-run, since no one will trust him after his detection; partly he obscurely hints that there may be a final judgment of God to be reckoned with. Apparently this suggestion is not merely made for the benefit of the orthodox reader but represents a laudable inconsistency in the author's own views, a belief that honesty is not merely the best policy, but has a higher sanctity of its own which Hobbes's analysis of morality fails to



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account for. Perhaps he was more deeply influenced than he knew by the traditional English hatred of a lie, as something inherently base.

Hobbes now enumerates no less than sixteen subsidiary 'laws of nature,' that is, conditions without which peaceable common existence would be impossible. The general character of the 'laws' is negative; they are prohibitions of various forms of behaviour which may be expected to lead to a breach of the peace, and the deduction in each case, takes the form of an appeal to self-interest. *E.g.* if I show myself revengeful, arrogant, or unwilling to refer a dispute between myself and my neighbour to a disinterested and impartial arbitrator, I am doing what lies in me to prolong the 'state of war,' and am thus losing the increased security of life and enjoyment of its good things which peace would have given me. The whole body of the nineteen 'laws,' Hobbes says, may be summed up in the simple formula which had already been given as an equivalent for the second 'law': 'To leave all men unexcusable, they have been contracted into one easy sum, intelligible even to the meanest capacity, and that is, Do not that to another which thou wouldest not have done to thyself; which sheweth him that he has no more to do

in learning the laws of nature, but when, weighing the actions of other men with his own, they seem too heavy, to put them into the other part of the balance and his own into their place, that his own passions and self-love may add nothing to the weight; and then there is none of these laws of nature that will not appear unto him very reasonable' (*Leviathan*, c. xv.).

We see, then, that Hobbes's 'laws of nature,' looked at as a whole, afford a fair formulation of the fundamental negative condition upon which the maintenance of social order depends; no man is to expect more from his neighbours than he is willing that they should expect from him, and no man is to interfere with the doings of his neighbours in any way in which they may not equally interfere with his. The competitors in the great struggle of life are to start fair, and to 'play the game.' What we should seek in vain in any of Hobbes's expositions of his social doctrine is the great Hellenic conception of the state or community as having a further positive function, a duty to ennoble the lives of its members, so that each of them may, if he will, climb to spiritual heights which he could not have scaled alone. Hobbes can hardly be said to have any real belief in social institutions as the

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instruments and bearers of progressive civilisation, he treats them as merely so much machinery for the preservation of a *status quo*. He has mastered only the first half of Aristotle's famous dictum that 'the city comes into being that men may live, but continues to be that they may live well.'

We may now pass at once to a demonstration of the necessity of the organised state and its machinery. The 'laws of nature' are, indeed, in themselves a sufficient code of conduct, and if they were always observed, peaceful social existence would be guaranteed with all its accompanying benefits. But in the 'state of nature' we can have no security that they will be obeyed. They 'oblige in *foro interno*; that is to say, they bind to a desire they should take place; but in *foro externo*, that is, to the putting them in act, not always,' since a man who persisted in keeping them while all his neighbours broke them, would infallibly lose by his conduct, and it is impossible, on Hobbes's theory of human nature, that a man should persist in doing what he knows to be contrary to his private interest. Thus they are, rightly speaking, not as yet laws, so long as men remain in a 'state of nature.' For a law means a command given and enforceable by a definite

person. 'These dictates of reason men use to call by the name of laws, but improperly; for they are but conclusions or theorems concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defence of themselves, whereas law properly is the word of him that by right hath command over others' (*Leviathan*, c. xv.). What is needed, then, to secure actual obedience to them is that they should be converted into commands issued by an authority which has rightful claims to obedience, and has also sufficient force at its disposal to secure obedience by the infliction of such penalties for disobedience as may make it always to a man's own advantage to obey. What is needed is, in fact, the institution of a ruler, or sovereign, and with the creation of the ruler we have passed at once into a state of civil society, or political subjection. This is why, with Hobbes, the creation of a ruler or chief magistrate is identical with the creation of society itself, and rebellion against the ruler equivalent to the dissolution of the social bond itself.

Before we go on to examine the way in which the ruler is created, there are two points to which it is essential to call attention if Hobbes is not to be greatly misjudged. In spite of his insistence upon the view that the 'dictates of reason' do not

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become actual commands until there is some one to enforce them, Hobbes is not justly chargeable with the identification of the moral law with the caprices of an autocrat. The validity of the moral law, though not its character as '*law*,' is with him anterior to the establishment of the ruler, and depends upon what he takes to be the demonstrable coincidence of morality with the general interest. { What the ruler is needed for is to provide the individual with a standing adequate *incentive* to behave morally, and Hobbes is at great pains to urge that his favourite constitution, an absolute monarchy, is precisely the form of society in which the ruler is least likely to have any personal interest independent of the well-being of the community, and may therefore be most safely trusted to see that his '*laws*' embody nothing but the conditions necessary for peace and security.

And again, though Hobbes's argument amounts to a defence of absolutism, the defence is throughout based on rationalistic and, consequently, democratic grounds. He is entirely free both from the superstition of a '*divine hereditary right*' inherent in monarchs, such as the Stuarts laid claim to, and from the doctrine that mere force itself constitutes right. His object is to show that



the absolute authority of the sovereign has a foundation in right by tracing it back to its supposed origin in a voluntary 'transference of right' on the part of the subject, a transference made in the interests of the subject himself, and so to legitimate absolutism by giving it a utilitarian basis. The *jure divino* royalists were thus completely justified in their instinctive distrust of Hobbes. When once it is granted that absolute sovereignty is only defensible *if* it can be shown to be for the general interest, the door is opened for further inquiry whether absolutism really *is* for the general interest or not, and, if it can be shown that it is not, for the rejection of absolutism itself. Thus Hobbes's theories really contain the germs of the constitutionalism which he combated. To declare that absolutism requires an utilitarian justification is to be already half-way on the road to revolution; there is much more community of spirit between Hobbes and Locke or Sidney, or even Rousseau, than between Hobbes and Filmer.

The immediate object of Hobbes's deduction of the rights of the sovereign is closely connected with the political controversies of his own time. He is anxious to disprove the claims made by Parliament against the British Crown to be, in



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a special sense, the *representative* of the people and of popular rights. He therefore sets himself to argue that, in every society, the supreme executive authority is already itself the true representative of the whole community; the community, consequently, cannot be again 'represented' by any other institution, and all claims made by such institutions to authority co-ordinate with, or superior to, that of the executive, on the plea of their 'representative' character, must be nugatory. To effect this proof, he has recourse to the technical terms of the Roman law of corporations and their legal representation. He starts with the legal definition of a *person*. A person means any being whose words and acts are considered in law as issuing either from himself or from any other man or thing to whom they are attributed. In the latter case, where the words and acts of such a person are legally regarded as belonging to some other being or beings, whom he *represents*, the representer is an *artificial* person (e.g. an advocate, speaking from his brief, is an artificial person, who represents his client; what he says is taken in law as if it were uttered by, and committed, not the advocate himself, but his client). When the being thus represented by another owns the

words and acts of his representative, he is said to authorise them, and the representative speaks and acts with *authority*, so that an act done by authority always means an act 'done by commission or license from him whose right it is.' This at once leads to the conclusion that, by the 'law of nature,' any being who has 'authorised' another to represent him is bound by all engagements entered into by his representative on his behalf, so far as they come within the scope of the authorisation, exactly as if they were his own words or acts. To repudiate them is to be guilty of a breach of the law that covenants when made are to be kept.

This point being granted, it only remains to establish the proposition that all governments must be regarded as originating in a commission bestowed by a whole community upon the government to 'represent' it, and the logical defence of absolutism is complete. Accordingly Hobbes now proceeds to reason as follows. An aggregate of individual men can only become a true society in so far as it exhibits a unity of will and purpose. It is this unity of will which constitutes the multitude into a community. But there is, properly speaking, no such thing as a 'general' will, or will of society at large, which is not that of individuals. Only

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by a legal fiction can we speak of anything but individual beings as endowed with will. Consequently, the unity of society is only possible by means of representation. The 'will' of the society becomes a real thing when the original aggregate agree to appoint a determinate man, or body of men, their representative, i.e. to take the volitions of that man, or that body of men, as 'authorised' by every individual composing the aggregate.

In this way, and only in this way, an aggregate may, by legal fiction, become one *person*, i.e. a collective subject of legal rights and duties. 'A multitude of men are made one person when they are by one man, or by one person, represented so that it be done with the consent of every one of that multitude in particular. For it is the unity of the *Representer*, not the unity of the *Represented*, that maketh the person one. And it is the Representer that beareth the person, and but one person; and unity cannot otherwise be understood in multitude. And because the multitude naturally is not one but many, they cannot be understood for one, but many, authors of everything their representative saith or doth in their name, every man giving their common representer authority from himself in particular, and owning all the actions the representer doth' (*Leviathan*,

c. xvi.). The only way, then, in which an aggregate of men can form themselves into a society for mutual defence against outsiders, and against one another's anti-social tendencies, is by unanimous agreement to appoint some definite man, or number of men, to act as their representative, whose commands each of the aggregate is henceforth to regard as issuing from himself, and by whose actions each henceforth is to regard himself as bound, exactly as though they had been performed by himself. In this way, the 'laws of nature,' the conditions of peace and security, become actually operative, since by making such an agreement, the represented implicitly authorise their representer to employ their united physical force, as though it were his own, in restraint of all disobedience to his commands, and thus create a coercive power adequate enough, to give every individual personal motives to obey.

'The only way to erect such a common power . . . is to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will; which is as much as to say, to appoint one man, or assembly of men, to bear their person; and every one to own and acknowledge himself to be the author of whatsoever he that so beareth

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their person shall act or cause to be acted in those things which concern the common peace and safety, and therein to submit their wills to his will and their judgments to his judgment. This is more than consent or concord; it is a real unity of them all in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man. . . . This done, the multitude, so united in one person, is called a *Commonwealth*. . . . This is the generation of that great *Leviathan*, or rather, to speak more reverently, of that mortal God, to which we owe, under the immortal God, our peace and defence. For by this authority, given him by every particular man in the Commonwealth, he hath the use of so much power and strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof he is enabled to form the wills of them all to peace at home and mutual aid against their enemies abroad. And in him consisteth the essence of the Commonwealth, which, to define it, is one person, of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the author, to the end that he may use the strength and means of them all as he shall think expedient for their peace and common defence. And he that carrieth this person is called *Sovereign* and said to have



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sovereign power, and every one besides, his *subject*' (*Leviathan*, c. xvii.).

One or two points in this deduction call, perhaps, for special remark. (1) It should be clear that, in spite of his absolutist leanings, what Hobbes is trying to express by the aid of his legal fictions is the great democratic idea of self-government. The coercive powers of the ruler are only legitimated in his eyes by the thought that they give effect to what is at heart the will of the whole people over whom he rules; the sovereign is, in effect, the incarnation of the national will. But as his philosophy will not allow him to admit the reality of any purpose which is not that of a definite man, he has to conceive of this national spirit and purpose as having no actual existence until it is embodied in a representative of flesh and blood. The nation is one man, with a will and purpose of its own, but it is one only by the legal fiction which treats the acts of an agent or representative as if they were those of that which he represents. To borrow an analogy from the case of the individual, the soul of the great artificial 'body politic' is not diffused over the whole organism, 'all in every part,' but definitely located in a central organ, or brain. This is why Hobbes is so careful to insist that legitimate sovereignty



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of his must be based on an express or tacit consent of every member of the subject body, and also why he is afterwards at great pains to argue that his favourite form of government, the absolute sovereignty of a single man, is just the one in which, from the nature of the case, the ruler is least likely to have any private interests of his own distinct from those of the community, and, in fact, is most nearly a mere mouthpiece of the national will.

(2) With Hobbes, as we see, the creation of a commonwealth, and the creation of a central coercive or executive power, form one and the same act. It is by the constitution of an executive that the 'laws of nature,' which bid men to seek peace and ensue it, cease to be amiable but impracticable ideals and become operative realities. He is thus the author of the doctrine, revived in the nineteenth century by Austin and his disciples, that sovereign power is in its nature one and indivisible, and that there can be no real distinction between the different functions of government, so that the making of laws may belong to one set of persons, the enforcing them by penalties to a second, and the interpretation of them in particular cases to a third. It is on this point that Hobbes's political theory is most

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soy strikingly at variance with those of his best-known successors. When Locke formulated the philosophy of the Revolution Whigs in his treatises on *Civil Government*, he was inevitably led, in the attempt to justify resistance to a chief magistrate who violates his trust, to make a distinction which is opposed to the central thought of Hobbes. With Locke the fundamental and original 'social compact' consists simply in the determination of a number of men to live in future under a known and common law of action instead of being guided by the uncertain and fluctuating dictates of individual judgment, i.e. in the will to establish a common legislature. The appointment of a definite set of persons armed with power to put the decisions of this legislature into act—the creation of executive officials—is a later proceeding, and the chief magistrate thus becomes a mere delegate of the legislature, a trustee, who may lawfully be removed whenever he transgresses the limits of the powers delegated to him. Locke is thus the author of the famous doctrine of the 'division of powers' between distinct 'branches' of government, and of the theory of the importance of 'constitutional checks,' by which one 'branch' may be hindered from usurping the functions of the others.

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(3) We might perhaps add that in virtue of his definition of the ends of government as exhausted by the preservation of 'peace and common defence,' Hobbes may be regarded as a forerunner of the negative *laissez aller* doctrine of the functions of the state. The sovereign is there, in fact, to remove certain standing obstacles to the secure prosecution by his subjects of their individual aims, to keep society from relapsing into primitive anarchy. With his defective theory of volition, Hobbes can naturally find no place for any conception of the state as an organisation for the positive promotion among its members of the 'good life' or 'civilisation' or 'progress,' or whatever else we may please to call that ideal of life, by which the rational free man is distinguished from the barbarian. The very existence of moral and social progress is, in fact, just the one striking feature of historical civilisation which his account of human nature, to be consistent with itself, is bound to ignore.

## CHAPTER V

### THE POWERS OF THE SOVEREIGN

THAT the legitimate powers of a sovereign are absolute, and that all resistance to his authority must be a 'breach of covenant,' and therefore unjust, are consequences which follow directly from Hobbes's conception of the fundamental conditions of social existence. The sovereign has, in fact, been authorised by me, if I am a member of the Commonwealth, to make what regulations he thinks fit for the preservation of order and peace, and to use the whole physical force of the community to punish or prevent violations of those regulations. Refusal to obey, or resistance to the execution of the sovereign's command is thus a distinct breach of my given promise, and against the 'law of nature,' *i.e.* the rational consideration, that covenants ought to be kept, *i.e.* that the making of them is useless unless they are kept. Hence the duty of unconditional obedience on the part of the subject. But there

is no corresponding duty on the part of the sovereign. He has been expressly authorised to make such regulations as he thinks fit, and, consequently, no violation of compact can be pleaded against him, no matter what commands he may think good to issue. Hobbes throws this latter part of his argument, which aims at justifying the Stuart claim of irresponsibility of the kings of England to their subjects, into a curiously artificial form. The argument by which the sovereign is set up is, he says, one between each individual member of a crowd and every other. There has been no agreement between the whole community as such, on the one part, and the sovereign, on the other. Before the creation of the Leviathan, in fact, the community has no corporate existence, as such, and the sovereign is, as yet, no sovereign, but only one man, or a number of men, among others, and therefore there are no such parties as sovereign and public to bargain with one another. Or even if we suppose that the person finally created sovereign had ~~procured~~ his nomination by private bargaining with individual members of the crowd, yet when once he has been declared sovereign all these bargains become invalid, since he now, as sovereign, has the right to say what agreements shall or shall not be con-

sidered binding. Hence no act of a sovereign towards any of his subjects can be unjust; in a commonwealth, justice, in fact, simply means observing the rules of conduct which the sovereign has laid down (*Leviathan*, c. xviii.). But if I plead that I was not a party to the original agreement of every man with every man to accept this particular sovereign, and to acknowledge his acts as if they were my own, then he is not *my* sovereign at all, and I am no member of the society which, as such, is created by his elevation. Towards him and them I am still in 'the state of nature,' and may without injustice be treated as an enemy, and subject to all that is incidental to the 'war of all against all.'

It follows that a sovereign, once instituted, can in no case be guilty of an injustice towards any of his subjects. And Hobbes bids us take note that in the psalm which, according to the notions of the seventeenth century, expresses David's penitence for adultery and murder, no acknowledgment is made that the author had done a wrong to Uriah in first corrupting his wife and then compassing his death; it is for sin against *God* that the Psalmist entreats forgiveness, not for wrong done to man. So, Hobbes concludes, it is the teaching of Scripture, as well as of reason,



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that the ruler can never be unjust to his subject, and therefore never lawfully accused, judged, or condemned by those who have themselves agreed to take his orders as the measure of just and unjust. Still, it is admitted, a ruler may abuse his power, as David did, and if this is not injustice to the subject, it is at least *iniquity* for which the ruler is amenable to the judgment of God. 'Though the action be against the law of nature, as being contrary to equity (as was the killing of Uriah by David), yet it was not an injury to Uriah, but to God. Not to Uriah, because the right to do what he pleased was given him by Uriah himself; and yet to God because David was God's subject, and prohibited all iniquity by the law of nature. Which distinction David himself, when he repented the fact, evidently confirmed, saying, *To Thee only have I sinned (Leviathan, c. xxi).*' As in a former case, this suggestion of a divine judgment to which even the irresponsible sovereign is amenable, leaves us in a perplexing uncertainty how far it is a concession to the weaknesses of orthodox readers, or how far it may represent a genuine feeling on the writer's part that there is, after all, a moral authority more ancient and august than the various leviathans men have made for themselves.

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It must not of course be supposed that it is only a monarch who can be absolute. Hobbes is careful to point out that it follows from his theory of the 'social compact' that every government, when once duly established, whatever its form may be, is clothed with the same absolute authority over its subjects. Indeed, it is in the case of a 'democracy,' i.e. a state in which the whole assembly of citizens is itself the sovereign body, that he thinks the fact of absolute authority most patent. 'When an assembly of men is made sovereign, then no man imagineth any such covenant to have past in the institution, for no man is so dull as to say, for example, the people of Rome made a covenant with the Romans to hold the sovereignty on such and such conditions, which not performed, the Romans might lawfully depose the Roman people. That men see not the reason to be alike in a monarchy and in a popular government proceedeth from the ambition of some, that are kinder to the government of an assembly, whereof they may hope to participate than of monarchy, which they despair to enjoy.' (*Leviathan*, c. xviii.) Hobbes is, however, of opinion that of all forms of government monarchy best answers the purpose for which sovereignty is instituted, and that for several

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reasons: (1) A monarch's private interest is more intimately bound up with the interests of his subjects than can be the case with the private interests of the members of a sovereign assembly. 'The riches, power, and honour of a monarch arise only from the riches, strength, and reputation of his subjects. . . . Whereas in a Democracy or Aristocracy, the public prosperity confers not so much to the private fortune of one that is corrupt as doth many times a perfidious advice, a treacherous action, civil war' (*Ib.*, c. xix.)—a sentence upon which the history of the relations of the restored Stuarts with the Court of France surely affords an entertaining commentary. (2) A monarch is freer to receive advice from all quarters, and to keep that advice secret, than an assembly. (3) Whereas the resolutions of a monarch are subject only to the inconstancy of human nature, those of an assembly are exposed to a further inconstancy arising from disagreement between its members. Monarchy thus offers the maximum of security for 'continuity' of policy. (4) A monarch 'cannot disagree with himself out of envy or interest, but an assembly may, and that to such a height as may produce a civil war' (*Ib.*, c. xix.).

Against these advantages of monarchy may be pleaded two disadvantages, (1) the ill effects produced by the influence of flatterers and favourites with the monarch, and (2) the disorders which arise when the monarchy descends to an infant or an imbecile. These, however, are discounted by considering (1) that flatterers and favourites, in the form of interested demagogues, are as common in popular as in monarchical government; and under the former have more power to do harm and less to do good than under the latter. 'For to accuse requires less eloquence (such is man's nature) than to excuse; and condemnation, than absolution, more resembles justice' (*Leviathan*, c. xix.); and that the powers of an infant imbecile monarch can always be placed in the hands of a qualified body of regents, and therefore any disturbances that arise must be attributed not to the inherent defects of monarchical government, but to 'the ambition of subjects, and ignorance of their duty' (*Ib.*). As we have already seen, Hobbes's conception of human nature and the ends of action precludes his reckoning with what a more idealistic philosophy would probably regard as the chief objection to despotism, even when it is both benevolent and capable, viz. the conviction that freedom and self-

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government are in themselves goods of the highest order, and that a slight increase in efficiency is dearly bought by their sacrifice.

From the principle that all authority is in its nature absolute, Hobbes has no difficulty in vindicating for the English Crown the leading powers which had been challenged by the Puritan revolution. In particular, we may note (1) that the monarch is in nowise bound to govern—in modern phrase, in accord with the 'Acts of Parliament.' Parliament is merely a body called together by the monarch to advise him as to the state of the kingdom and the measures to be taken for the common peace. The claim of an elected Parliament to be, in a special sense, the 'representative of the people' is entirely unfounded. The people are already completely 'represented' by their sovereign—the monarch—and consequently cannot be represented over again. What powers Parliament has it enjoys simply as a voluntary gift on the part of the real 'representative of the people,' who is therefore free to follow its advice, to reject it, to promulgate laws of his own without consulting it, as he thinks best (*Ib.*, c. xxii.). (2) The monarch has likewise the right to supreme command of all the forces of the community by



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and sea; he has been instituted to take charge of the common peace, and therefore must be understood to be entrusted with the means necessary to the execution of the task. Thus the demand of the Long Parliament for control of the militia was an act of usurpation. (3) The monarch, again, has the sole right to levy taxes at his own discretion, a right specially insisted upon by Hobbes with reference to the controversy about ship-money. (4) He has also the right, arising from his position as the authority from whom all the rules of justice emanate, of 'hearing and deciding all controversies which may arise concerning law, either civil or natural, or concerning fact' (*Leviathan*, c. xviii.), since, apart from this right, 'there is no protection of one subject against another.' It would follow then that the opposition to the extraordinary jurisdiction of the Star Chamber, the Ecclesiastical Commission, and the Council of the North was entirely illegitimate. (5) The monarch also has, and this is the most important point of all, the sole right to judge what opinions, in Church and State, may safely be tolerated. For it is his function, as keeper of the general peace, 'to be judge of what opinions and doctrines are averse, and what conducing to peace.' It follows, there-



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fore, that it is for him, and for him alone, to decide 'on what occasions, how far, and what men are to be trusted withal in speaking to multitudes of people, and who shall examine the doctrines of all books before they be published. For the actions of men proceed from their opinions, and in the well governing of men's opinions consisteth the well governing of men's actions in order to their peace and concord' (*Leviathan*, c. xviii.). Of the bearing of this conclusion upon Hobbes's views of the ecclesiastical supremacy of the sovereign I shall have something to say in the next chapter.

It must be observed that the highly doctrinaire character of this defence of the Royalists' position at once lays it open to a damaging attack which Hobbes does nothing to meet. He has proved conclusively, if you grant the truth of his peculiar view of human nature, that 'peace and concord' are only attainable in political society. He has also shown that in every political society there must be somewhere a centre of authority endowed with plenary powers, and only restrained in the exercise of them by the consideration that governmental authority, pushed beyond a certain point, will provoke rebellion and so defeat its own ends. What he has not proved, but is con-

tent simply to assume, is that, as a matter of historical fact, this plenitude of power is, under the constitution of England, reposed in the person of the king, or in other words, that the government of England is really a monarchy in his sense of the term. Now this was precisely what the Parliamentary statesmen denied. According to them, the powers of the English Crown were, in point of fact, and had always been, circumscribed by a superior authority, which is described *e.g.* in the *Petition of Right*, as 'the laws and statutes of the realm,' 'the laws and customs of this realm,' and they had, as we know, sound historical reasons to urge in support of this view of the case. < As Hobbes never takes issue on the historical question, his leading opponents would have been perfectly justified in calling his argument, as applied to the proceedings of the Parliamentarians, an elaborate *ignoratio elenchi*. > The question at issue between Charles I. and Hampden or Pym was not whether the ultimate seat of authority in England is 'absolute' or not, but where that seat of authority lies. Hobbes's evasion of the real question throws a flood of light upon the fundamental weakness of the theory which treats government as legitimated by 'contract.' Such a hard and fast theory is bound to

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be, at some point or other, discrepant with the actual facts of the historical situation. A constitution is not a thing which is made once for all by the wisdom of a particular set of persons; it is something which grows up gradually under all sorts of perceptible and imperceptible influences. At any given time, the various formulæ by which it is described by those who live under it are sure to be only imperfectly consistent with one another. Nay, further, since the formulæ for the most part are things devised to fit a past state of affairs, which continue to be repeated long after the situation they describe has been profoundly modified in fact, they are almost certain to be largely false when accepted as an account of the stage of development actually reached, long before they lose their inherited prestige. And of development and progress as great social facts, Hobbes, as we saw, has as good as no conception.

From his examination of the powers of the sovereign, Hobbes advances to a consideration of the liberties of the subject. One might be tempted to think that the latter must be non-existent in such a scheme as his. But there are certain inevitable limits even to the most unrestricted absolutism, and there are others which suggest themselves as soon as absolutism itself is

treated as only defensible on a utilitarian basis. What these limits are, according to Hobbes, is explained in chapter xxi. of the *Leviathan*. The 'liberty of the subject' is simply that part of the supposed original 'right of every man to everything' of which he cannot possibly have divested himself, or of which he cannot be supposed to have divested himself without defeating his purpose in entering into the 'social compact'—viz., the preservation of himself. He is free then (1) to refuse, even when commanded by the sovereign, to kill or maim himself, or to submit without resistance to those who are charged to kill or maim him; (2) to refuse to confess a crime, except upon previous promise of pardon; (3) to refuse to execute an order to kill another man, and more generally to decline any dangerous or dishonourable office by executing which he imperils that very self-preservation for the sake of which he has entered into social life. On this ground Hobbes justifies the refusal of 'men of feminine courage' (like himself) to do personal service as soldiers, provided they are ready to furnish a sufficient substitute. Even a band of rebels, he holds, may without injustice refuse to capitulate except on a promise of pardon. To these elementary liberties we subsequently find added com-

plete liberty of conscience, so far as private thoughts are concerned. Thought is absolutely free, simply because it is impossible to subject it; the expression of thought in words, as we have seen, is not free at all, it being for the sovereign to decide what thoughts may be made public without danger to the peace. It has only to be added that the authority of a sovereign, of course, only lasts so long as he is able to ensure the general safety, for no covenant can deprive a man of his right to protect himself when he has no other protector. Political allegiance is therefore terminated, the life of the *Leviathan* extinguished, when a monarch is captured in war and purchases his personal liberty by submission to the conqueror, or when he voluntarily releases his subjects from their obedience, and so declares that he no longer embodies the public will for self-protection.

## CHAPTER VI

### CHURCH AND STATE

SINCE it has been already declared that the sovereign, in the interests of the general peace, has the sole right to determine what opinions may be safely taught in the commonwealth, it follows at once that Hobbes can allow of no division between a civil and a spiritual power. In fact he holds, as a man of the seventeenth century not unreasonably might, that the most potent of all sources of anarchy and civil disorder is precisely the claim of the clergy of various churches to possess an inherent right, not depending on any grant from the political authority, to declare what religious doctrines shall be taught and what form of church discipline permitted, and to depose or rebel against civil rulers who refuse to submit to their dictation on these points. Writing, as he did, in the seventeenth century, Hobbes found it necessary to plead the cause of Erastianism not only on grounds of reason, but by the aid of an



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appeal to Scripture, and the consequence is that nearly a half of *Leviathan* is taken up by the ecclesiastical controversy in which he has to oppose at once the Romanist, the Scotch Covenanter, and the ordinary Anglican High Churchman. It is impossible in a short sketch like the present to do more than indicate the general character of the singular result at which he arrives. The key to his whole position must be sought in his pithy aphorism that religion is not philosophy, but law. That is, the sovereign authorises the preaching of certain doctrines and prohibits others, not because the former are scientifically true, and the latter false (in fact, we saw long ago that all doctrines about God lie outside the limits of human knowledge), but because the former are conducive to peace, and the latter to discord. And our profession of faith in the authorised religion is to be understood not as a declaration of our philosophical belief, but as a declaration of our submission to the rightful political authority of the sovereign. Hobbes has then to meet the objection that, on his view, our duty to the sovereign must, whenever the sovereign is an 'infidel,' lead us into disobedience to God. The 'infidel' sovereign commands us to practise a 'false' religion, God commands us, in his Word,

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to embrace the 'true.' Are we then to obey man rather than God, and must the martyrs who died for the faith be accounted criminals? Hobbes's reply is, in principle, that we have to learn what is the 'true' religion from the 'canonical' Scriptures, and that a writing depends for its 'canonical' character upon its authorisation as such by the sovereign, who also, in virtue of his general right to prohibit dangerous teaching, is the final court of appeal as to the interpretation of 'Scripture.' It must, therefore, be vain to plead our interpretations of some work which we regard as 'inspired' in justification of our refusal to submit to the sovereign. As for the martyrs of history, no man can be a 'martyr,' or witness for the truth of a revelation from God, except its immediate recipient. All that any other martyr can testify to is his belief in the veracity of the person who claims to have received the revelation. To reject his witness is thus not to reject his commands of God, but merely to reject the claims of a certain person to have had communications with God. Now the only way in which a man can prove his divine commission is by the performance of miracles, and since miracles have ceased, no one can now establish his claims to be believed as a messenger of God except indirectly by the agree-

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ment of his teaching with that of Christ and the apostles. But Christ and the apostles taught, both by precept and by example, the duty of submission to civil authorities. Hence no man can claim their authority in favour of disobedience to the sovereign. In the purely hypothetical case of a man receiving to-day a direct command from God to disobey his sovereign, he must, no doubt, be prepared to obey God, who can make it his highest interest to do so, rather than the sovereign; but since he is unable to prove his divine commission by miracles, he has no ground for complaint if the sovereign refuses to believe in it and punishes him as an offender.

To make this doctrine more palatable to his readers, Hobbes combines it with an elaborate scriptural exegesis of his own, in the development of which he rivals or outdoes his orthodox antagonists in profusion of biblical quotations and ingenuity of interpretation, not infrequently throwing out remarkable anticipations of more modern criticism. [ The fundamental proposition of the whole scheme is that the 'kingdom of God,' spoken of in Scripture, is not an ecclesiastical system, but a civil government in which God, as represented by a visible human lieutenant, reigns as civil sovereign. This kingdom was first

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instituted when Moses was directly installed by God as His representative in the government of the Jews, but suspended when that people revolted from their lawful rulers, the successors of Moses, and set up the kingdom of Saul. The mission of Jesus was to announce its restoration, not in his lifetime, but in an age yet to come, when the righteous are to rise from the dead and be reigned over personally by Jesus, as God's representative, in Palestine. Hence the only condition imposed from the first as necessary for entrance into the Church was the acknowledgment of the belief that Jesus is the 'Messiah,' *i.e.* the destined monarch of the coming 'Kingdom of God.' All that a Christian is obliged to, therefore, as a condition of salvation is the belief that at some future time Jesus will reappear on earth as a civil sovereign, and the intention of then obeying his authority; in the meanwhile the Christian is bound, by the express language of Scripture itself, to complete submission to the existing civil power. As for the 'Church,' which sometimes claims to be the 'Kingdom of God' announced by Jesus, and consequently to have a first lien, so to say, on the obedience of Christians, Hobbes gives us a choice of alternatives. 'If it be one person, it is the same thing with a commonwealth of Christians,

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called a *commonwealth* because it consisteth of men united in one person, their sovereign, and a *church* because it consisteth in Christian men united in one Christian sovereign. But if the church be not one person, then it hath no authority at all; it can neither command, nor do any action at all . . . nor has any will, reason, nor voice, for all these qualities are personal.' (*Leviathan*, c. xxxiii.) It is then argued at length that the only commission given by Christ to his apostles, and by them to their successors, was to teach and persuade, and the only weapon with which they were armed against the recalcitrant, the power of excommunication, *i.e.* the threat of exclusion from the future 'Kingdom of God.' Such power as the clergy now exercise in Christian countries, then, is derived from, and dependent on, the political sovereign, who is the single fountain at once of temporal and 'spiritual' authority. They are, in fact, so far as concerns their social status, a body of civil servants, and nothing more, and Hobbes declares that whereas the king of England, as responsible to no tribunal on earth, may rightly claim to rule *Dei gratia*, a bishop holds his see 'by the grace of God *and* the king's permission.'

The fourth and last division of *Leviathan* is

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devoted to an unsparing attack, conducted chiefly with an eye to Bellarmine's arguments for Papal supremacy, upon 'the kingdom of darkness,' that is, the church organised as a society independent of the authorisation of the civil power, and claiming an independent 'spiritual' jurisdiction to be enforced at its peril by the 'secular arm' through the medium of temporal disabilities and penalties. The origin of this 'kingdom of darkness' is sought in the ambition of the Roman clergy, which led them first to accept support and grants of power from the Christian Roman Emperors, and finally, in the general decay of the imperial system, to usurp the place of their original protectors. 'If a man,' says Hobbes, in one of his most famous epigrams, 'considers the original of this great ecclesiastical dominion, he will easily perceive that the Papacy is no other than the ghost of the deceased Roman Empire sitting crowned upon the grave thereof. For so did the Papacy start up on a sudden out of the ruins of that heathen power' (*Leviathan*, c. xlvii.). The ghost, Hobbes adds, has partly been exorcised in England, first by the Tudor sovereigns who overthrew the power of the Pope, then by the Presbyterians of the Long Parliament who put down the Bishops, and finally (we must remember that this sentence,



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which does not appear in the modified Latin text of 1669, was written in 1651), by the Independents, who destroyed the domination of Presbyterianism, 'and so we are reduced to the independency of the primitive Christians, to follow Paul or Cephas or Apollos, every man as he liketh best, which, if it be without contention . . . is perhaps the best' (*Ib.*). But, he adds, the exorcism will never be complete until a bold ruler takes in hand the universities, the chief sources hitherto of high ecclesiastical pretensions, and compels them to instruct their students in the true rudiments of political science, and the true grounds of political submission. That is, said his critics, until the *Leviathan* is officially made the sole text-book of political science.

## CONCLUSION

THE true measure of Hobbes's greatness as a philosopher was hardly recognised either by his own contemporaries in England or by their successors of the eighteenth century. The innumerable attacks of the orthodox upon his theories, on the ground of their alleged irreligious and immoral tendency, are mostly of an ephemeral kind, but the attitude of Locke and Berkeley, who had capacity enough to understand him, if they had cared to do so, and who would have found his nominalism at least entirely to their taste is more significant. Locke never mentions his name at all throughout the *Essay*, and when accused by Stillingfleet of arriving at results similar to those of Hobbes, retorts with a sarcasm upon the good Bishop's familiarity with a 'suspected' author. Berkeley mentions him once, in his *Alciphron*, along with Spinoza and Vanini, as a typical atheist. Though Warburton, with his usual love for a paradox, prided himself on having been the first person to discover the real strength of Hobbes's

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position, real appreciation of his merits in England begins with the utilitarians of the early nineteenth century, Austin, Grote, and Molesworth, to the last of whom we owe the only approach as yet made to a complete edition of Hobbes's works. Down to their time Hobbes's chief influence on English thought lay in the stimulus his ethical theories afforded to a profounder moral analysis and a deeper study of human nature on the part of antagonists who sought to vindicate the originality of disinterested action and to base morality upon grounds independent of positive law. The ethical work of Cudworth, of Shaftesbury, of Cumberland, of Butler is throughout inspired by the felt need to meet and overcome a conception of human nature which goes back, in the end, to the philosopher of Malmesbury. On the Continent the direct influence of Hobbes made itself more immediately and more permanently felt. Within the philosopher's own lifetime Spinoza had adopted, as the basis of the theory of government given in his unfinished *Tractatus Politicus*, a view of 'natural right' and the 'social compact,' which is, in all fundamentals, identical with that of Hobbes, whose influence is also visibly traceable in the argument for the freedom of philosophy

from theological restraints set forth in the famous *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Leibniz, too, in his youthful recoil from scholasticism was powerfully attracted by Hobbes's clear-cut logical nominalism and outspoken materialism, nor did he cease to express his admiration for the Englishman's genius after he had finally arrived at his own mature doctrine of spiritual realism. It has been shown that throughout the eighteenth century, down to the time of Kant, Hobbes continued to be an object of philosophic interest in Germany. But the detailed facts as to his influence at home and abroad belong to the general history of modern thought, and necessarily fall outside the limits of a brief sketch like the present.

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*Leviathan*. Reprints—(1) In Morley's (now Routledge's) *Universal Library*; vol. xxi. of the original series. (2) In the *Cambridge English Classics*, 1904. (Cambridge University Press.)

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